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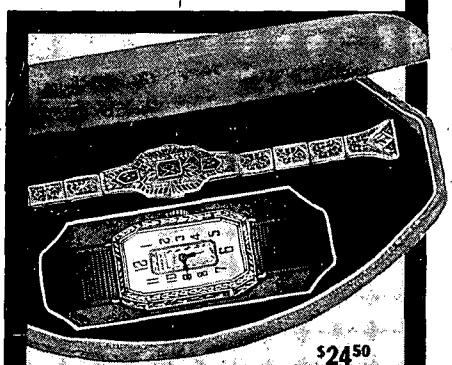

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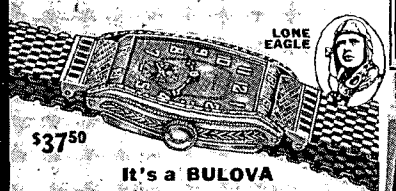

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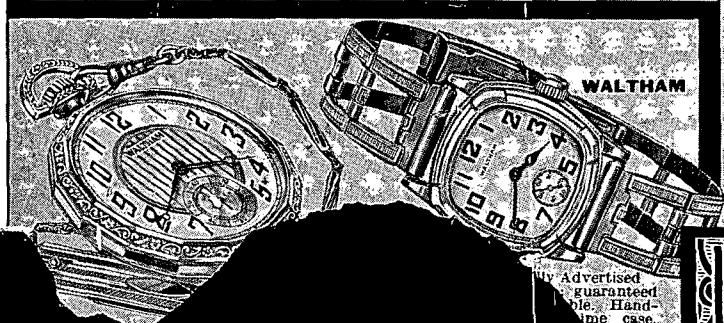

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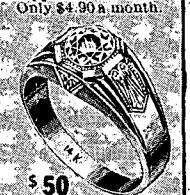

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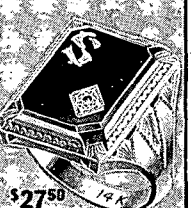

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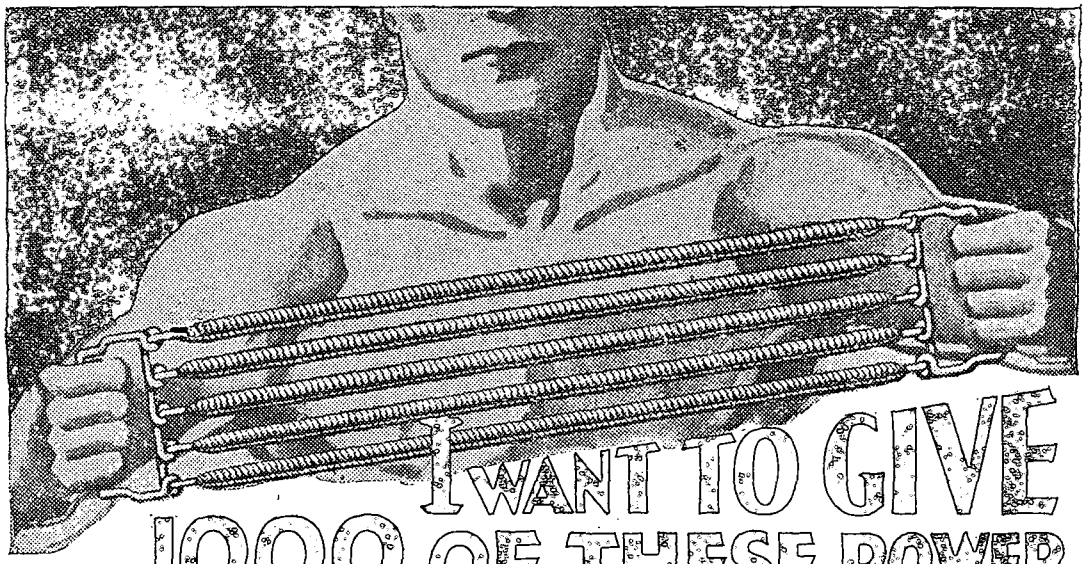

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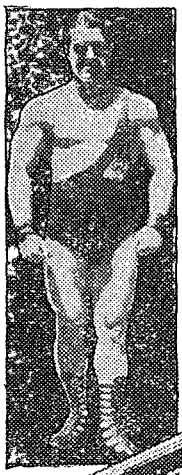

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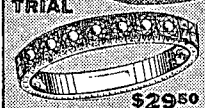

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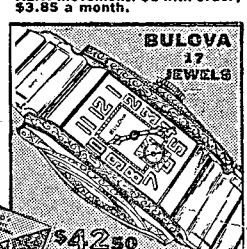

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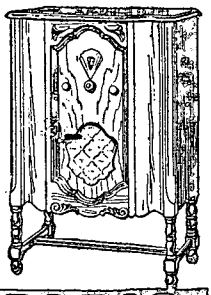

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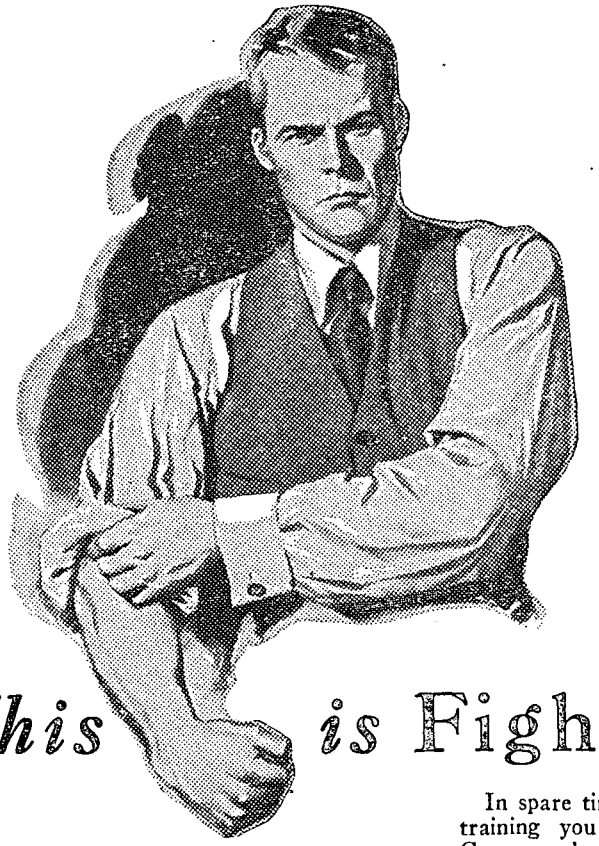

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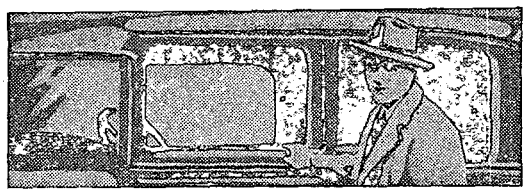

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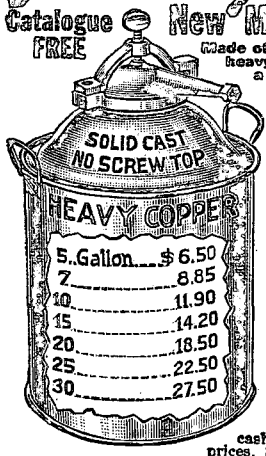

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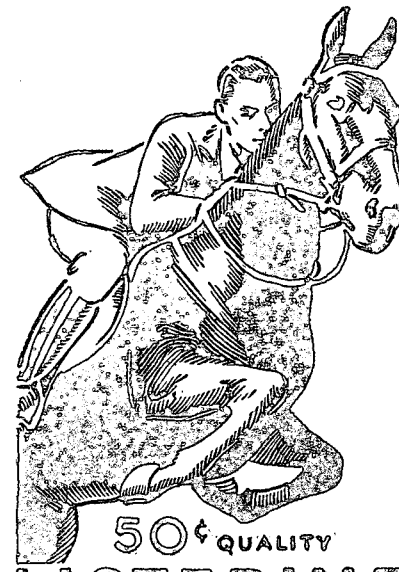

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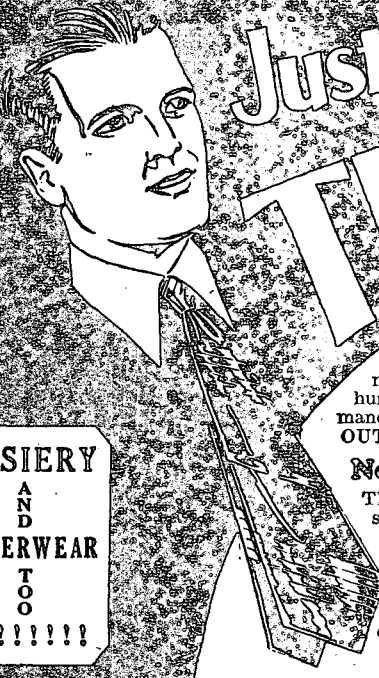

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"DON'T! You'll make him the laughing stock of the place"

but when he started to play the piano . .

WHAT a glorious night! Henri's quaint restaurant was crowded with joyful parties. Tonight, John Brent was giving a party for eight in honor of Helen Thompson's engagement. Dick Peters had recommended Henri's as a splendid place to dine and dance. And Dick was right.

"What's that in your pocket, Dick? Your will?" asked John.

"No, that's just some sheet music I bought on the way over," returned Dick.

"What in Heaven's name are you doing with sheet music? Going to use it as wall-paper?" exclaimed John.

"Why, I'm learning to play the piano. Didn't you know?"

"Oh boy! Listen to that! You couldn't learn to play in a thousand years."

Dick looked at John with an amused smile on his face.

"What would you give to hear me play?" he asked calmly.

"A ten dollar bill if you'll go up there right now and play that piano. What do you say?" exclaimed John with triumph in his voice.

"You're on," replied Dick, quick as a flash. "I'll take you up on that little dare. But not here—wait 'til we get home tonight."

"No, sir, you'll win or lose that bet right now. Come on, fellows, let's take him right up to the piano and we'll settle it here."

"Don't be foolish, boys, you'll only make us the laughing stock of the place," begged one of the girls.

Heedless of Dick's pleading, they dragged him to the platform and placed him at the piano. By this time the unusual goings on had caught the attention of everyone in the restaurant. Now Dick realized that he had to go through with it. So summing up all his courage and with a sudden burst of confidence, he broke into the chorus of the latest Broadway hit.

John gasped. He couldn't believe his ears. Everyone at the table sat in open-mouthed amazement as Dick sat there playing one snappy number after another. It wasn't until the regular orchestra returned that they allowed Dick to rise from the piano.

Amid the din of applause, he went back to the table, only to be swamped with questions. But Dick refused to tell them the secret of his new-found musical ability, in spite of all their begging.

Going home that night Dick finally gave in.

"Well, John, I've put one over on you, I learned to play by myself, without a teacher."

"What? That's impossible! Tell me more."

Dick Tells His Secret

Dick then explained how he had always longed to be able to play some musical instrument. One day he chanced to see a U. S. School of Music advertisement offering a Free Demonstration Lesson. Skeptically he sent in the coupon. When the Free Demonstration Lesson came he saw how easy it was. Why, it was just like A-B-C. He sent for the entire course and almost before he knew it, he was playing real tunes and melodies. And the lessons were such fun, too. Almost like playing a game.

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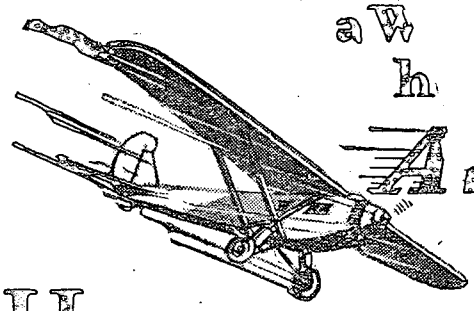

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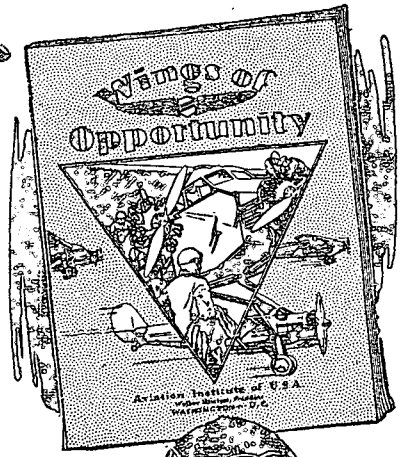

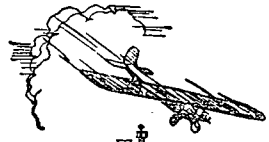

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Short Stories

Title Registered in U. S. Patent Office

November 25, 1930

R. de S. HORN
Editor

FREDERICK CLAYTON
Associate Editor

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Cover——Gerard C. Delano

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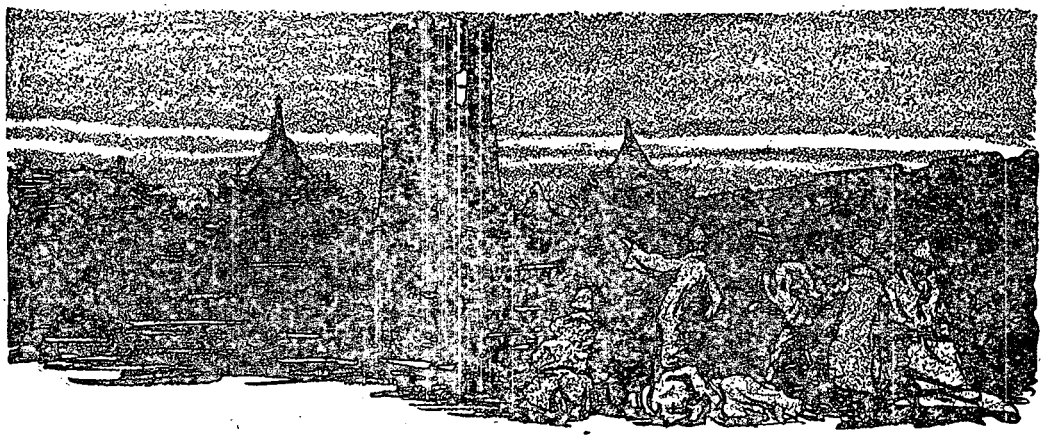

The Romance and Mystery of the Orient

The Threat of Yellow Pirates

The Dangers of Unknown Lands and Waters

The Tiger of Siam

novelette by

H. BEDFORD-JONES

In the Same Issue—Stories of Adventure by

JAMES B. HENDRYX **GORDON YOUNG**

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RALPH R. PERRY **L. PATRICK GREENE**

BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

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next issue

SHORT STORIES

next issue

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TWICE A MONTH

Short Stories

NOVEMBER 25th 1930

The Flying Redskin

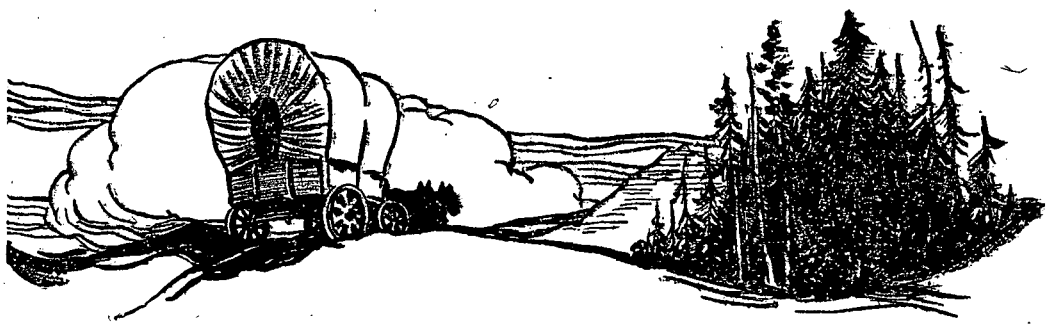
THE other day we heard of an Indian, a Blackfoot named Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance, who has decided to take up flying and has enrolled himself for a course in aviation at Roosevelt Field. He is reputed to be the only American Indian ever appointed to the United States Military Academy, but before he graduated he left to enter the Canadian Army during the World War. Since he distinguished himself during those years of warfare in Europe, some of you may have heard of him. And lately, so it is said, he has been a motion picture actor in Hollywood.

Shades of Sitting Bull, Spotted Eagle and Yellow Dog! Long departed ghosts of Chief Powhatan and little Pocahontas! An American Indian—and a Blackfoot at that—a member of the American Army, of the Canadian forces, a movie actor. And now an aviator! How is it that the Great Spirit and the arrows of all his ancestors do not strike him dead?

Yet we cannot but admire this Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance. For he is manifesting an ability to adapt himself to a changing and utterly new environment that has not been characteristic of his race in years gone by. It is inconceivable that his forefathers would have been able to do as he has done, but there is no doubt that the generations who have come and gone since those earlier days of resistance and Indian wars, ought by this time to have been able to take on the civilization that the whites have brought into a land that was once their undisputed domain. But they have not done so, and their numbers have continued to dwindle with the passing years. That is what makes a lone individual like this Blackfoot such an isolated and remarkable example. He has shown that he is in step with the times, even in spite of the fact that he has come out of a race that can hardly be said to have been "progressive."

——What would Powhatan have thought if Captain John Smith had descended upon him in an airplane or a Zeppelin? That's an unfair question, of course, for the old chief simply wouldn't have been able to comprehend it; but for Captain John Smith, at least, matters would have been tremendously simplified. Powhatan would have had not the slightest doubt that these white men were really gods. With motion pictures and airplanes to over-awe the Redskins, perhaps there wouldn't have been any Indian wars. Perhaps far fewer Redskins would have bitten the dust than was actually the case.

THE EDITOR.



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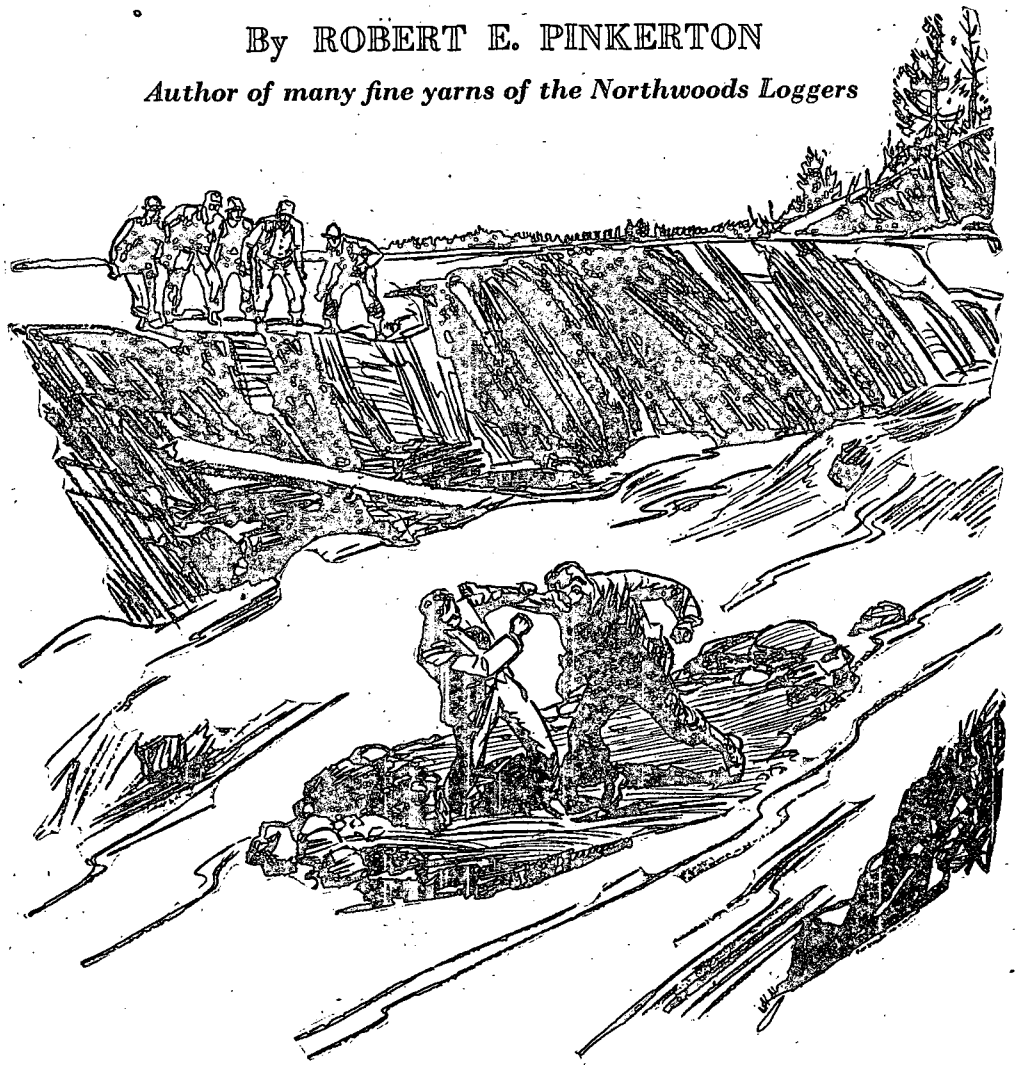
HELL'S NOON WHISTLE BLOWS

By ROBERT E. PINKERTON

Author of many fine yarns of the Northwoods Loggers



CHAPTER I

A WORTHWHILE BET

OLD Moses had a clothing store on River Street in Kettle Falls. Every other building in the two blocks housed a saloon, and every saloon was doing a good business on this day late in June. The spring drives were in, the town was full of lumberjacks, and hell's noon whistle had blown.

Swinging doors burst open from the impact of tumbling, heaving bodies that rolled across calk-torn sidewalks into the street. Arms flayed and noses bled and eyes puffed and breath was exhaled in the glad grunts of conflict.

Often a dozen or more fights were being waged simultaneously but none aroused comment or drew attention. The owner of a poultry farm doesn't stop work every time a hen cackles.

To one man on River Street this mad profusion of single combats was an astounding state of affairs. Little Isadore Aaronson had just arrived in Kettle Falls to work in his uncle's clothing store, and he stood in the doorway, pop-eyed and not unafraid, so absorbed he did not see

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Square Fisted Methods Triumph over Cunning in the Mightiest Battle of the Big Woods Logging Country

a big lumberjack approach until he was lifted by the collar and tossed inside.

"I want a suit o' clothes," the lumberjack said. "Not too fancy and no shenanigan on the price or you 'n' me'll just roll out into the street and settle it there."

Isadore forgot all his instincts and training as he scurried behind a counter and swiftly and awesomely appraised the size of the customer. He wondered if he dared ask more than the cost figure from one of these terrible creatures.

But selling was easy. The first suit offered was accepted and the price paid. And then Issy's world tumbled about his ears. The lumberjack tossed the vest into the open door of the cold stove, hacked eight inches off each trouser leg with a knife, donned pants and coat and strode out.

From down near the river came a wild, rough chorus, and a crowd of fifty or sixty men appeared, swinging down the center of the street, steel-shod shoes kicking dust, heads back, throats bellowing:

"Oh, I went up the Eau Claire to drive,
But I thought they'd never begin;
The wind was blowing dead ahead,
AND *Kelly was drunk again."*

Isadore popped out of the door and

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began taking down suits that hung on a sidewalk rack. He was terrified. The lumberjack who had just bought a suit gripped his shoulder.

"Easy," he said. "I'm a stranger here, from Black River. What's the excitement?"

"You ain't so strange as I am," Issy cried shrilly. "But my uncle says when Jack Reed's crew comes I'm to close the shop and close it quick."

The eyes of the man from Black River sparkled. He had heard of Jack Reed, as had every river pig in Wisconsin. Wealthy lumberman thought he was, Jack himself brought down the rear of his annual drive and, the last log in the boom, led his roaring crew into town. Churches held special prayer meetings, merchants took in sidewalk displays and the city's police devoted themselves to a mythical burglary epidemic in a district far removed from River Street.

Jack Reed now strode at the head of his men, bellowing a driving song. Wool shirted, stag trousered, calk shod, he was one of them. Those lumberjacks had gone into the woods in September, had not been out since. It was a point of pride with the boys who brought down the rear of Jack's drive, and now they were at the end of nine months without whisky or personal combat. That head of steam would drive a battleship.

Opposite the clothing store, Jack Reed wheeled and marched into the open door of Barney Malone's saloon, the crew at his heels. The man from Black River drifted along with the last and unobtrusively sought a corner seat. Men lined the bar two deep. Bottles and glasses clinked.

"Hey, Barney!" Jack Reed bellowed. "We want some money."

"Sure, Jack! How much?"

"Sixty in the crew. Hundred dollars apiece ought to get 'em started."

"But that's six thousand! I haven't got one."

"Get it!"

"But the banks are closed," Barney protested.

"Get it!" Jack repeated harshly. "And get it quick."

Barney ducked out of the saloon. Jack Reed's men drank and refilled their glasses.

"What sort o' rotgut's this?" Jack roared as he spit out the second drink. "The stuff Barney makes in the cellar with old rubber larrigans and prunes?"

"It's the best we have," the bartender retorted.

Jack reached across and grasped the man by his white jacket. "Listen, feller. You're a stranger and we'll excuse you this once. But my men don't pass over a year's wages for anything but the best. Get it!"

He shook the bartender with sudden ferocity, let him go. Fresh bottles were brought out, bottles with government stamps over the corks.

A HALF hour later Barney Malone returned with a big roll of money. How he got so much cash, no one asked or cared. Jack Reed helped him count and apportion it. A fight started, and another, and the combatants rolled in a corner or out across the sidewalk unnoticed.

Other lumberjacks drifted in, mostly men of Jack Reed's drive who had been in town a day or two and now tentatively discussed the merits of the roaring crew. More fights. Strangers came, river pigs of other drives, reckless, swaggering fellows well aware that their mere presence in Barney Malone's place meant battle.

One of these, black browed, burly, drunk but steady on his feet, shouldered his way to Jack Reed's side.

"What's your name, feller?" he demanded insolently.

"Jack," was the good-natured answer. "Have a drink."

"I don't drink with strangers, or with any man I can't lick."

The crowd drew back. "You'll go thirsty," Jack Reed laughed.

He turned away, but he did not stop turning. The movement gathered terrific speed and force, and ended with Jack's right fist catching the stranger on the jaw. The man went down. After a while he struggled to his feet.

"Have a drink?" Jack invited.

"Sure. We ain't strangers any more. And say, feller. If you want to see a real

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fight, stick to me until this Jack Reed hits town."

"I'm Reed."

The stranger blinked. "I'm hired," he said shortly.

"Sure. Look me up in the fall."

A boy entered the saloon, squirmed through to Jack's side and handed the lumberman a note. Jack read it, glowered, tore it up and ordered a round of drinks for the house.

A cheer came from near the door and the crowd turned to see a young fellow enter.

"So you finally got the rear in," the newcomer said and grinned, and instantly he was attacked by a dozen men who, feigning rage at the insult, bore him up to the bar and then fought for the honor of buying him the first drink.

Jack Reed's men were not troubled by the necessity of dividing their allegiance. They had plenty to share between their employer and Barry Page, Jack's walking boss. In Barry they saw merely a continuation of the logging skill, fairness and two-fisted ability which had carried Jack Reed to leadership and wealth.

Drinks followed each other quickly now. Jack Reed was becoming hilarious and wanted to sing. The man from Black River who had watched with twinkling eyes, came from his corner and confronted the lumberman.

"My name's Ben Black, and I'm from Black River," he announced. "But the christenin' party was too much for the preacher and I come out of it 'Black River' Ben."

He stepped back, eyeing Jack Reed, and said deliberately, "I'm the best canthook man in the State of Wisconsin but I'm mighty particular about who I work for. Was you thinking about offerin' me a job?"

Jack Reed understood perfectly but he was at that stage where singing was far more appealing than fighting, and just then another boy wormed through to hand him a note. The lumberman read it, frowned, passed it to Barry Page. Barry read:

Dad! You've got to come. I'm surrounded by the wolves.

Dot.

Instantly the walking boss stepped in front of his employer and faced Black River Ben.

"I do the hiring for Jack Reed," he said, "and I never saw a canthook man yet that was worth a damn."

The fight that started instantly was not permitted to wander into a corner or out into the street unnoticed. When Barry Page fought, every other activity ceased. Men with a supreme confidence in their own ability in any rough and tumble affair conceded to the walking boss a supremacy beyond their powers.

The truth was, Barry was a natural fighter, one of those rare combinations of physical and nervous equipment and a fighting heart. He had a little skill but an instinctive timing and judgment of distance, and he never ceased to bore in, and he never quit.

Many a lumberjack was taller and heavier. Barry weighed about a hundred and eighty-five pounds, which is near the figures of most great ring champions, and, as an old Miramichi lumberjack once expressed it, "Every one of those pounds is always trying to do more'n any of the others."

Black River Ben was heavier, and there was a world of power in his big body. He fought, too, with a smiling recklessness, often with a grin of delight. But that grin faded into bewilderment after five minutes, and a little later Ben woke up under a table.

He crawled out, grinning as he wiped the blood from his face, walked to the bar and ordered drinks for the house.

"I'll never touch a canthook again long as I live," he said to Barry Page. "And if you've got any sort o' odd job lying loose —even flunkyin'—I'll take it."

"You'll swing a canthook," Barry retorted.

"Shouldn't wonder but what you're right. But if I ever catch one of you alone, I'll lick hell out o' you."

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MORE drinks. A few more fights, none of which received a glance. Barry plucked Jack Reed by the sleeve and drew him aside.

"That note," the walking boss whispered. "I don't know what it means, but Dot seemed sort of anxious."

"Wolves," Jack Reed said. "And you got to come with me, lad. Can't let any wolves get my little girl."

They went outside, started down the street, in which several fights were in progress.

They left River Street at the next corner, crossed the business district and started down a long, shady avenue. There was no noise or fighting here. Their calked shoes bit into sidewalks that had never been shredded by rivermen's feet. Women and children in white summer garments were on the verandas. An occasional driving team passed, drawing a glistening carriage.

"What's this wolf business?" Barry Page asked.

"Never mind," Jack growled. "You come with me."

He turned into the most imposing place on the street and stomped across the lawn to the front steps. There he halted. A line of calk holes, painted over, led to the door.

"Did that last year," Jack said. "Caught hell for it. We'll take our shoes off."

They sat down, removed their destructive driving gear and then went up the steps shod in woolen socks. Jack opened the front door and entered, dragging Barry with him.

Two men and two women, all in evening dress, were crossing the hall from drawing room to dining room. The elder of the two women shrieked. The younger came running forward.

"Oh, dad!" she cried. "You're just in time! Hello, Barry."

Dorothy Reed kissed her father and shook hands with his walking boss. Mary Reed, her mother and Jack Reed's wife, was making frantic signals, and now she came forward.

"We'll wait dinner," Mrs. Reed whispered to her husband. "Run up and dress. Mister Page, I'm sorry there won't be a place for you."

"What!" Jack roared. "Then make a place. Barry's as hungry as I am and I won't change either. I earned my money in these clothes and they're good enough to eat in."

Mrs. Reed was too wise a woman to try force where force would fail. "Of course," she agreed. "Come and meet our guests. You, too, Barry."

Thus Barry Page, lumberjack, found himself sitting at a table aglitter with silver and cut glass. At his left sat Jack Reed, his wool shirt open at the throat. On Barry's right sat the suave and immaculate Warren Stark, wealthy lumberman of Milwaukee, and across was Dot Reed beside Norman Stark, Warren's son.

It was oil and water, dynamite on a hair trigger. Warren Stark had made his money sitting at a desk, buying and selling timber lands, sawmills and lumber. Norman Stark, a big handsome fellow, already taking a leading part in the business, paid elaborate court to Dot Reed and was equally attentive to her mother.

It was maddening to Jack Reed. He had always celebrated the end of the drive with his crew. Champagne tickled his nose and produced no effect. He read mockery in Warren Stark's politeness and raged inwardly when he saw the son look at Dot.

He was aware, too, that Stark was manipulating the conversation. The polite questions about the drive were a prelude, but Jack was angered rather than placed on his guard. He had the woodman's scorn for city people, and his answers were quick and often surly. Barry Page, listening and watching, saw Norman Stark exchange a glance with his father.

Stark was clever. His polite queries became opinions that roused Jack still more. He spoke of modern methods in logging, contrasted them with the old, and stated at last that the work in the woods was a mere routine matter of slight importance.

"Then you don't know logging!" Jack growled.

"It is not necessary today," Stark said easily. "The cutting and driving are only the crude and easily forecasted side of the business, questions of detail."

"Detail! Crude, eh?" Jack lifted himself half out of his chair. "Wait until you

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try getting out that timber you own on the West Fork of the Red Deer."

"That's merely a matter of hiring competent men," Stark answered.

"Then you don't get the timber!" Jack snorted.

"And you could?"

"I've got a crew that can log Siberia and bring the drive through Bering Straits."

Stark smiled patronizingly. "You own some timber on the East Fork of the Red Deer River, Mister Reed," he said. "Doesn't that give us an opportunity to test our theories?"

Jack Reed's eyes glowed. "It's a go!" he cried. "I'm takin' out fifty million from the East Fork next year. You take out the same on the West, and we'll see who gets to the Forks first."

"Might make a little bet on it," Stark agreed.

"Sure! Ten rounds o' drinks for every man jack on the job."

"Oh, come now, Mister Reed. Something worth while. How about ten thousand?"

Jack glared at him, then around the table. He caught a gleam in his daughter's eyes. Dot was for him, and there was a sneer on Norman Stark's face.

"Worth while, eh?" he shouted. "If you've got the guts it will be worth while, Stark. I know what you own on the West Fork and your kind knows what I own on the East. I'll bet my holdings against yours that I beat you."

Stark gasped. Barry Page was astounded, but he was alert, and he saw a bright light flash in Norman Stark's eyes, then a drooping eyelid and a scarcely perceptible nod.

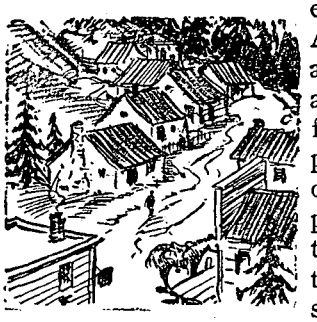
"We'll draw up the papers in the morning," Warren Stark said.

Chapter II

FIRST BLOOD

TO JACK REED and Barry Page, the effort to win that bet was purely a matter of logging, of cutting timber, hauling it to the river bank and then driving it downstream. It was a question of tested and loyal crews pitted against men picked up anyhow and anywhere, of logging brains and grit.

They carried this idea through the summer, when they were busy building dams on the East Fork, cutting a tote road and erecting camps. All Jack's skill and experience and all Barry's force were employed that the dams might be properly placed to make driving the turbulent stream as certain and as easy as possible.



To these two it was a test, a sporting endeavor, a proving that personal contact and fairness with their men was of essential value in harvesting white pine logs in a land where rivers were foes to be conquered.

Jack and Barry even welcomed the massing of lumberjacks in Kettle Falls by the Starks when autumn came, and they chuckled over what their own gang of hard-bitten men would do to the Stark lumberjacks if a battle started.

"Tryin' to scare us," Jack grinned. "Showin' he's got the best crew."

"Wonder where he found 'em," Barry added. "There's men in town I'll bet never saw an ax."

"Sure. That's where he falls down. And if he hasn't got real river drivers next spring on that West Fork, he'll be sorry he made the bet."

"Losing ought to hit even a man like Stark pretty hard," Barry suggested. "And he didn't look like a gambler to me."

"So'll it hit me hard," Jack laughed. "Dot was worrying last night, tellin' me to be careful. She knows I won't have anything left if I lose."

A big lumberjack strolled through the office door and lounged against the desk. "Where's that canthook?" he asked.

Barry remembered and grinned. "You go into Camp One next week," he said. "Black, eh?"

"Ben Black. 'Black River Ben' to employers and friends, 'Black Death' to

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enemies and bartenders and one of 'those filthy river pigs' to everyone north of River Street. I ate last two days ago, ain't had a drink for a week and I've had to lick two men this morning because they said the Starks was going to win their bet."

"Go out and lick two more," Jack laughed as he peeled a five-dollar bill from his roll, "and bet the change on us."

"I'll do my bettin' later when I can get one of their crew to put up his year's stake against mine."

He wandered out but turned at the door. "Guess there's nothing I can tell you about these Starks," he said. "Or is there?"

"Nothing," Jack growled.

Many of the Reed men were already in the woods, where they had been building camps and dams. Others were gathering in Kettle Falls, strolling up and down River Street. Most of them were broke. Jack arranged credit for their meals, and any old-timer in the Reed forces could get his name on the slate in Barney Malone's saloon.

It was a quieter crowd than had finished the drive in the spring. There were few fights and almost no heavy drinking. The bet between Jack Reed and the Starks had become a matter of common knowledge and was the sole topic of discussion. It was the cause of an occasional battle with several of the many strangers in town, but the Stark men had little to say. Apparently they did not have loyalty or interest. It was only another winter's job with a big and impersonal company.

BUT Black River Ben, strolling about River Street, his keen, dancing eyes noting many things and his amusing comments probing into unsuspecting minds, was troubled.

"There's something funny about these Stark lads," he said when he met Barry Page in Barney Malone's place. "They're hanging off."

"They'd better," Barry laughed. He knew every man in Jack Reed's employ, had known him for years, and finer lumberjacks never laced a calked shoe.

"Anyhow," he added, "we don't win the bet in Kettle Falls. Our crews go into camp in the morning. I'm leavin' now."

"Where's Jack?"

"In Milwaukee. Seein' a bank. He'll be back tomorrow."

Barry's confidence did not free Ben's mind of worry. There was a tension in the air that did not come from the swagger of Reed men as they went about the business of spending their last night in town.

Fights occurred inevitably, but there were not many. Stark's men evaded the Reed lumberjacks where possible, and as the evening wore on they kept out of the saloons. Ben, wandering about, saw few of them, and these all old-time lumberjacks. Jack Reed's crew was scattered. Barney's place, of course, was fairly well filled with them, but others, spoiling for an opportunity to bait Stark men, hunted their prey through the River Street saloons.

Black River Ben loved drama, and could sense it afar. But he loved, too, to be on the inside, to know what was going on. Now, though something told him an explosion was imminent, he was baffled. The unholy quiet sent him questing to the far end of River Street and he missed the lighting of the fuse.

After all, Ben was not to blame. The Northwoods had never seen men like those who arrived on the train from the south at ten o'clock. A car was filled with them, silent, hard-faced individuals who slipped off the steps on the far side and were quickly lost in the freight yards.

None wore calked shoes. All had coats, a garment seldom seen in the Northwoods. Most of them were thick shouldered and thick waisted, and they walked with a peculiar swagger not at all like the confident swing of the lumberjack. Their faces, stubble covered, were pale; their eyes furtive.

They appeared suddenly in River Street, marching in a compact body, and as if by magic their number grew. Men slipped out from behind saloons, from dark doorways, men whom Black River Ben had been watching for several days. Many were lumberjacks, the others strangers who had never seen a white pine fall.

There was no noise, and a swift cer-

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tainty characterized their movements. In front of Barney Malone's place they wheeled, crossed the sidewalk and entered three abreast through the double door.

It was like a flood flowing down the long room, sweeping all before it. Fifty or sixty of Jack Reed's men were there, standing at the bar and scattered among the tables, and they leaped to the fray with glad shouts and no regard for the steady stream of strangers coming through the door.

A fight was what they wanted. The odds meant nothing. They were Reed men, capable of whipping any others on earth, and they did not waste time in beginning.

For a while the Reed men held back the horde that still streamed into the saloon. Tall, rawboned, bodies hardened by years of toil, legs made nimble as a dancer's by spinning logs, the old-time lumberjack was as competent a rough and tumble scrapper as the world has produced, and Jack Reed's men were the pick of the State.

Fear could not find lodgment in their scheme of things. Battle was the expression of an excess of health and energy, and of a philosophy of life. Work hard, drink hard, fight hard! Existence meant nothing more.

THAT gang of plug-uglies Stark had imported from Chicago—not the modern gunman but the hoodlum of the old World's Fair days—had never met men like these lumberjacks of Reed's. If you knocked one down, he got up again. If you kicked him in the face when he was down, he jerked your feet out from under you and smothered you with blows and raked your shins with steel calks. They didn't act according to rule, these loggers. They were hicks, and therefore should have been easy prey—but they fought like ten dozen wildcats.

The Chicagoans knew they had been in a fight. They had thought that it would be easy, and that they were organized, yet they had unearthed fifty separate charges of dynamite. Numbers and weight did not seem to have any effect. It is probable that, under normal circumstances, Jack's men would have won, even though they fought one to four. But they did not understand gang methods and they stuck to their old code of individual combat.

That is where Stark's men obtained the advantage that finally turned the tables. They were accustomed to the ganging method and they put it into effect. Three and four together, they chose an adversary

and quickly put him out of commission for the time being. It was a game they knew, and had often used, and against it the lone battlers of the Northwoods were helpless.

Yet the loggers fought to the end, standing there in the corner, never asking quarter, never ceasing the furious swing of their long arms. When at last the Stark crowd surged up to the bar and demanded drink, they left the shambles behind them.

Barney Malone let out a yelp. His saloon was a wreck. But a man led him aside, slipped him some bills and suggested that a closed mouth was conducive to health and long life.

Waged in the rear of the long barroom, the battle had not attracted attention in the street. A few who had seen the Stark men enter were gathered outside the door, but when they attempted to follow they found the way barred.

"The Stark crew owns this place tonight," they were told. "Keep out."

Black River Ben, still questing for the drama he expected, did not arrive until it was all over. He looked in at Barney's place, saw the type of men who thronged it, asked a question or two of those outside, and then went on. In a saloon a few doors away he found one of the victims.

"What we got to do is round up every Reed man in Kettle Falls," Ben said when he had heard the story. "Tell 'em to meet in the lumber yard."

Ben ran down the street, stopping in each saloon and shouting the news. When at last he reached the lumber yard, a hundred men were there. More came as

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plans were made. Ben did not take part in the discussion. He was a stranger, but he saw who the leaders were and whispered an occasional suggestion.

There was no need to rouse the men to a fighting pitch. Many of those who had fought in Barney's place were there, bleeding and sore, and ravenous for revenge. And their pride was at stake. The Starks might import hooligans from Chicago but nothing raised in a city could whip a lumberjack or drive a river.

They were off at last, sweeping down River Street, a grim, relentless, avenging horde. Miramichi from New Brunswick, State o' Mainers, veterans of the great pine forests of Michigan and Wisconsin, they were a reckless, splendid mob.

In front of Barney's place they halted, but did not enter. Black River Ben had seen the error of trying to force an entrance through the door. Instead, each man began hurling round stones, brought from the river bank, through Barney's windows, and to shout defiance.

The result was immediate. Stark's men, confident after their quick victory, each now with several drinks under his belt, came swarming out, and as the first appeared the Reed crowd charged, sweeping across the sidewalk and overwhelming the score or less that emerged.

It was over quickly. A dozen lay on the sidewalk or were crawling away. The lights in the saloon went out. Jack's men waited, expecting another rush, but none came. Some of the more venturesome peeked inside the door. All was quiet.

A crowd gathered in the street on either side of the Reed crew. A police whistle blew; a curious futile note that brought a laugh from the onlookers.

"Let's go in and get 'em," came the confident shout from Jack's men.

They were arguing this, milling about uncertainly, when the Stark gang, which had departed quietly and at once by the rear door, swept upon them from up the street.

A shower of bricks was the first warning of attack, and it was followed at once by a wedge of flying bodies that split Jack's crew and hurled the two parts aside.

WHAT happened after that became epic in the history of Kettle Falls and of the great pine woods. Up and down the street, across sidewalks, crashing through front doors and windows of saloons, scattering onlookers, raising a roar that was heard in the residence section of the town, the lumberjacks battled the alien forces.

When split by the charge, Reed's men snapped back into the conflict like released rubber bands. They had what they wanted now, freedom of a wide street and equality in numbers, and they were driven by pride and rage and a consuming desire for revenge.

It was as if two hundred slashing, boring, unthwartable Dempseys had been turned loose at once. Theirs was a skill developed in countless personal combats, a strength essential to their calling and an agility born on logs darting down turbulent rivers. Tall, lean waisted, wide shouldered, with flail-like arms and swift-driving legs, they were built for battle, and battle was their creed.

Blindly confident, they fought with glad recklessness and sheer delight. Darkness shrouded many a gallant combat there in River Street, for Jack's men scorned concerted action and quickly made it a man-to-man affair. The thickly pressed mob of Stark men broke up. Couples and groups whirled from it in furious struggle, slugging freely or clinched tightly and rolling about beneath calk-shod feet.

Even in the darkness, there was no difficulty in distinguishing friend from foe. When the Stark men charged down the street each had a white handkerchief knotted about his left arm above the elbow, and it became at once a red flag to their opponents.

Ben Black was in the midst of it. Ben loved intrigue and drama but attained the zenith of existence in battle. His voice sounded above the roar, his long, heavy arms swung with terrific force. Foes were plentiful. He need only finish off one and turn to the next.

Yet even in the zest of conflict, Ben's alert mind was at work. He found two white-badged opponents confronting him, then three. The shouting had died. A grim

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silence now hung over River Street, broken only by grunts and gasping oaths and the crunching of fists against bodies. Ben battled on, and as he fought he glanced about.

Men lay in the street, motionless. Small groups of Stark followers were forming in response to strange cries, and once formed they swept down upon a battling pair. When they passed on, their number had been increased by one, and a Reed man lay on the street unconscious.

The white-badged forces grew rapidly. There were more commands, and suddenly the Stark men were united and sweeping the street. Some of Jack Reed's men remained to oppose them. The others fled.

They returned later, a stunned, uncomprehending lot, crawling out from behind buildings, peering around corners. From saloons came sounds of celebration. In the street and on the sidewalks lay many men. These were borne away, to lumberjack boarding houses and hotels, where their wounds were dressed and the one Northwoods restorative applied.

There were no comments. Jack Reed's crew could not understand. They would not concede that better men walked, and yet they had been ignominiously defeated.

Black River Ben, helping carry away the injured and bathing their wounds, quickly shook off his amazement. Men were unconscious for an hour or more, and there was not a wound on them. Many others had badly cut heads and faces. One big lumberjack lay dead in the street, and nowhere had his skin been cut.

Ben's own face was covered with blood from a jagged scalp wound. And yet, except for that first shower of bricks, he had not seen a weapon used.

"No fists did all that," he muttered.

When daylight came Ben walked the length of River Street, stooping frequently. His pockets sagged with heavy objects when he returned to his hotel. A clerk friendly to the Reed men was on duty.

"There's the reason," Ben said as he emptied his pockets on a chair.

The old clerk, who had taken care of many a badly bruised lumberjack in his day, stared at the collection for a moment and then all the picturesque language he had picked up from loggers tumbled from his lips in a vain effort to make known his feelings.

"Brass knucks! Blackjacks! No wonder you lads didn't have a chance."

Chapter III

POISONED FEED

IT WAS a grim, silent crew that went in to Jack Reed's camps that fall. There was scarcely a reference to the battle of River Street, not a word as to the bet between Jack and the Starks, yet if the Starks believed they had intimidated their opponents they erred seriously. Jack's men were welded together as they never had been before.

Two of them were dead. A half dozen hung between life and death in the Kettle Falls hospital. Thirty others had to be sewn up before they could depart for the woods.

The authorities investigated, of course, but no action was taken. The Stark gang left town on a westbound train long before daylight. Jack's men, questioned, would not, and could not give definite information. When the sheriff visited the Stark camps on the West Fork of the Red Deer he was unable to find anyone in them who could be traced to the group that arrived from the south that night, or who had ever used blackjacks or brass knuckles.

Jack Reed returned from Milwaukee to discover what had happened. He roared into the hospital, threatened to whip any doctor who let a man die, arranged for the funerals of the dead and then plunged on into the woods to oversee the work that had already begun.

Barry Page was already pressing that, traveling from camp to camp, watching

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every detail. He reported curtly to Jack at Camp Three. Neither mentioned the River Street battle.

"Anyhow," Jack said, in his only reference to it, "there's nothing more they can do. It's logging from now on, and driving, and you can't do either with brass knucks."

Jack Reed remained in the woods, traveling with Barry from camp to camp, planning logging roads, inspecting dams, outlining the season's work. Letters came to him from politicians in Kettle Falls, requests for campaign funds and pleas that he remember his party, but after the first Jack threw them into the fire unopened.

"I've got my own troubles," he growled to Barry. "Let 'em look after their own."

It was a presidential year and tote teamsters brought in word of a great excitement in Kettle Falls. But Jack and his men did not care. Something more important than a national election was happening in their world, and the day for voting passed without notice in the Reed camps.

A week later news came of a complete upset in Kettle County. Sheriff, judge and district attorney, all of whom had held office for years, were defeated and men little known elected in their places. This meant nothing to Jack Reed and his crew. A log drive had never yet depended on county officials and, to Jack, one man was no better, or worse, than another.

LATE in November Jack and Barry stopped one night in Camp One. After supper Black River Ben entered the office and sat down behind the counter.

"Got your bet of a winter's stake down yet?" Barry asked.

"No," Ben answered slowly. "I'm not so keen for it as I was."

Jack half rose from his seat, then turned to the clerk. "Give this fellow his time and kick him out," he said harshly.

Ben gave no indication that he heard this. He was staring at the floor, lips pursed, eyes squinting.

"If it was just a question o' loggin', and drivin', I'd bet my wages for the next ten years," he continued. "That outfit on the West Fork isn't much. I was over to their first camp last Sunday."

"Get out," Jack snarled, but Barry lifted a warning hand.

"Then what you afraid of?" he demanded of Ben.

"The Starks are office loggers," was the answer. "They don't know the woods and, the way they look at things, they don't have to. They figure on winnin' some other way."

"There's only one way," Jack retorted. "The first man to get his drive to the Forks wins, and that means logs cut and logs drove."

Ben did not refute this. He stared at the floor again, at last drew a hand from a trousers pocket and reached across to Jack.

"Anything the matter with that?" he asked.

Startled, Jack looked at the hand. It held a large roll of bills. Ben tossed it to him, and the lumberman examined the notes, counted them.

"Where'd you get this?" he demanded.

"Five hundred dollars ain't it?" Ben asked casually. "Ever hear of a lumberjack havin' that much on him all to once, and in the fall?"

Jack Reed stared without comprehension but Barry Page was instantly alert.

"What you do to earn it?" he demanded.

"Any little thing I can. Mostly keep my eyes open. The Starks seemed to think I'd be able to give them their money's worth all right."

"But what can you do here for the Starks?" Jack protested.

"Deacon seat loggin'," Ben grinned. "I'd be pretty good at that, most as good as I am with a canthook. It's a lot o' fun," he chuckled delightedly.

"I got caught on a jury once, over on Black River," Ben continued, regardless of Jack's scowl. "A jackpine eater was bein' tried for stealin' hay from another homesteader. He was guilty, all right, and soon's they shut us up I started yelling for conviction. Talked over all the evidence, never gave the other eleven a chance to say a word, and they was all for hangin' that farmer.

"But when they started to vote I stopped

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'em. 'Look here!' I says. 'There's something I forgot,' and I starts through the evidence again, lookin' at it another way."

Ben stopped and chuckled. "Well?" Jack Reed growled.

"That jury would 'a' hung the other fellow, then, if I hadn't stopped 'em. Got my time made out, Joe?"

Ben arose and walked around the counter.

"Come back here," Jack commanded. "Never mind that time, Joe. You think you can talk my men into turning against me?"

"The Starks are bettin' five hundred dollars I can."

"But Ben," Barry Page interrupted. "What else are they planning?"

The man from Black River grinned at the walking boss. Since Barry had whipped him so decisively the previous spring, Ben's allegiance had been the blind, complete sort accorded by a dog. Ben demanded superiority in an employer, and he had found it in Barry Page.

"If I was you," he now said quietly, "I'd discover that a certain canthook man in Camp One was a square peg in a round hole and that he'd be a lot more valuable driving a team."

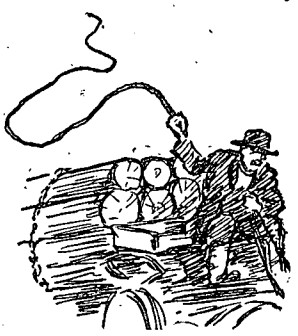
Jack Reed glared at Ben as if the man were mad but Barry turned at once to Ned Arthur, foreman of Camp One. "Fix that," he said. "Ben here's a teamster after this."

"And make it seem natural," Ben added.

THE weeks slipped by and nothing happened. Christmas came, the one holiday of the winter. Jack Reed sent a few cases of whisky into his camps, which was meant, and so understood by the men, as a token of appreciation solely and not a bid for their favor. Early the morning of the twenty-sixth the work was resumed.

Black River Ben was now established in the teamsters' sleeping camp. They were a clannish lot, teamsters, but Ben's handling of a skidding team, his nightly tally and his happy tongue quickly established him in their favor.

There wasn't a better groomed team in Camp One than Black River Ben's. Ben's name crept up the tally sheet until it reached the top. Then one of his horses calked itself rather badly and Ben became



a fussy nurse, going to the stables each night after supper to bathe the wound.

Jack Reed arrived at Camp One an afternoon in mid-January. The work in all four camps was progressing smoothly. Rollways were mounting. The defeat of his crew in the Kettle Falls battle was still finding expression in the attack on the white pine forest, and they were ahead of schedule, while news sifted in that all was not well in the Stark camps. Men were quitting, others taking their places. Camp foremen were driving the work, and no self-respecting lumberjack would stand for that.

Jack was happy now. There was a grin on his face as he sat in the office after supper, talking to Ned Arthur.

"Cutting logs is easy, only a detail, is it?" he chuckled ironically. "You can hire foremen and a walking boss—an' lumberjacks are so much cattle that you hire and fire and kick around. *Mebbe!* Wonder what Stark thinks now, with his camps five million feet behind schedule."

"And that West Fork will be a beast to drive," Ned added. "It's men that get logs to a mill, and not just the hiring of them."

A shout came from outside, and there was something so insistent about it that Jack and Ned rushed to the door. Another shout was heard, at the stables, and the teamsters' camp was spewing men into the night.

Jack Reed was the first to reach the stable door, and he met Black River Ben coming out, shoving a man before him.

"Hold this fellow!" he barked to Jack. "Get your teams out, you lads. Quicker'n you'd grab a drink."

"Fire?" someone yelled.

"No!" Ben shouted. "Poison—in the feed boxes!"

He darted inside, striking at horses'

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heads as he ran down the long alleyway between the stalls, scaring them from the mangers, and calling to the teamsters to do the same.

No lumbercamp had ever known a night like that which followed. Men fought blindly and ineffectually. The cook camp was robbed of mustard, the medicine chest of anything that would act as an emetic. Horses' heads were tied up and strange dope poured down their throats. When morning came fifteen of the beautiful big draft animals lay dead in their stalls and none of those that survived was strong enough to haul the bodies out.

At dawn Black River Ben went to the office, where a teamster, Sam Haney, had been held prisoner all night.

"He do it?" Jack Reed asked harshly.

"It's my fault," Ben answered. "I knew it was coming but I thought I'd catch him just before and not after he'd scattered the stuff."

Jack looked at the accused teamster. Haney had never worked in a Reed camp until that winter.

"You ain't a man, but you look like one," Jack said. "I'll make you over to fit."

It was a terrific battle for a few moments, but the lumberman's rage was not to be denied. When at last Jack rose to his feet, Haney lay unconscious on the floor, his face a bloody pulp.

"Ned," Jack said to the foreman of Camp One, "send down the road for that halfbreed that's got a dog team and have him haul this home."

Later the treacherous teamster was lashed on the toboggan and as he was hauled away Jack Reed started after him and tramped the six miles through the woods to the bank of the West Fork, where he kicked open the door of the office of the Starks' first camp. Norman Stark stood beside the stove talking to the foreman.

"Glad to see you, Mister Reed!" young Stark exclaimed heartily. "How are things going? Smoothly, I trust."

Jack slapped aside the young man's outstretched hand.

"Listen, you dirty Stark pup!" he said with such cold malevolence the other flinched. "Next time you try one of your tricks I'll come straight to you. Step out here!"

He led the way outside and pointed to the man on the toboggan, who had been unlashed by the halfbreed.

"See that!" Jack snarled. "It's the way you'll look, only worse."

He rolled the teamster off onto the snow with a thrust of his foot and strode away.

JACK REED returned to Camp One to learn that two more horses had died. Barry Page had arrived from upriver. "You'd better go out and buy some more teams," he suggested to Jack. "There's only six horses on the farm."

"You go," Jack retorted. "If that's the way the Starks are going to log, I'm staying here to watch 'em. This may happen in another camp."

"Horses are scarce and will cost you money."

"Get 'em, and get 'em quick. I'm going up to the other camps."

Two days later the new sheriff drove up to Camp One in a sleigh and asked for Jack, but Jack had gone. The sheriff went on, and the next noon returned with the lumberman in his sleigh. They stopped for dinner and when the robes were thrown back it was revealed that the owner of the Reed Logging Company was handcuffed.

Black River Ben, still nursing his sick horses, was in the cook camp when Jack entered.

"Well, well, Sheriff!" he exclaimed after a quick glance at his employer's face. "We been crowding the section lines too close and cutting somebody's timber?"

"Don't handcuff a man for that," was the gruff answer. "This beatin' up o' lumberjacks is getting too frequent in Kettle County."

"Oh! So a lumberjack's human, same as other folks?"

"It's murder for killin' one. That fellow Haney who was beat up here a few days ago is dead."

Barry Page returned to Camp One that night with the news that Jack Reed was in jail at Kettle Falls and that bail had been refused.

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"But Jack didn't kill that fellow!" Black River Ben protested.

"Haney's dead, and the coroner's jury called it murder," Barry answered. "The district attorney's doing a lot of talking about his duty and the law and how it falls on the high and low with equal force, and he says Jack will hang for this, sure."

"But Jack didn't kill him," Ben insisted. "That sort o' beatin' don't——"

"Haney's dead," Barry repeated, "and there's no chance o' Jack getting out o' jail. And that means our log drive'll be held up and Jack'll lose that bet with Starks."

"We can go on with the log drive and win the bet just the same," Ned Arthur said.

"Maybe; but the chances are awful slim. Trouble is, Jack's getting short of ready money, and it's a cinch he can't raise it from any bank long as he's in jail. Without money, we can't run these camps. We gotta get Jack out of jail and free him from this law mess some way or other. Only way to beat the Starks."

The work went on. Barry Page was called to town, where he learned that creditors were pressing for payment and threatening to cut off camp supplies. Like many a big lumberman in the old days, Jack Reed worked on borrowed capital. News of his wager with the Starks had not helped him in the banks, and now his arrest brought a crisis.

Barry patched up things as best he could, got a short breathing spell. But he learned in town that the district attorney was rushing the case, and a few days later he and Black River Ben and Ned Arthur were subpenaed as witnesses.

The trial was short. Jack Reed was like a caged bear. There could be no defense. The judge ruled out all reference to the horse poisoning. The jury had been drawn from that section of Kettle Falls most distant from River Street and antagonistic to lumberjack revels therein. A verdict of guilty was returned half an hour after the twelve good men and true had retired.

And it looked like the Starks had definitely gotten Jack Reed out of the way, tying up his logging operations and preparing for a big advantage in getting their own logs cut and driven downriver first to win the bet that would make or break either Jack Reed or Norman Stark.

Chapter IV

A Fugitive from Justice

NEWS of the verdict reached the camps on the East Fork the next night when the crews came in to supper. That evening in Camp Four, the farthest up stream, an old road monkey, loyal to Jack Reed with the last drop of his blood, jumped onto a deacon seat and addressed the silent crowd.

"There's no doubt Jack killed this fellow Haney," he began. "Barry Page and Ned Arthur saw him do it, and Jack never denied it. But the point is, the fellow needed killin'. That's as plain as the bark mark on a white pine log.

"Murder means killin' a human being, and you know as well as I do that any man who'll poison a horse ain't human. He's a skunk and a rat and he's right where he belongs now, under six feet o' ground.

"And that ain't all. This horse poisoner didn't have a grudge against the horses. He was hired by the Starks to kill them teams because of that bet Jack made with them. They're the skunks and the rats and they're the ones that's guilty of murder. Ain't that so?"

The little old road monkey's amazing reasoning was perfectly clear to his listeners. "You're damned good and right," they growled.

"So!" the old road monkey shouted. "We've proved Jack ain't guilty of murder. Jack Reed's the man most of us been working for the last twenty years. Every spring he comes into Kettle Falls with the rear, but does he go up to his big house and take off his calk shoes and poke his socks under a table that's groanin' with humming birds' wings and peacock tongues

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and French goose livers and wines and liquors and cigars?

"No sir! Jack Reed sticks to his own kind. He stays on River Street and drinks with us and fights with us just like the damned old river pig he is. And now I want to know if you're going to let that kind of a man be hung for kickin' a skunk out o' the trail! Or let him stay in jail while these Starks cut their logs and win the bet by driving them down first in the spring?"

A half hour later the men of Camp Four were strung out along the tote road on their way to Kettle Falls, a grim procession that trudged on in the darkness.

They walked all night, and all the next day, and at each of the other three camps their numbers grew. At noon it began to snow, and the wind blew out of the northeast. When the second night came the worst blizzard of the winter was roaring through the pines; and at nine o'clock, as the long line of lumberjacks struck the outskirts of Kettle Falls, the icy wind had swept the streets clean.

Jack Reed's men were still silent. They were six abreast now, and twenty-four hours of steady walking had not lessened their speed. Shrouded by the storm, they marched into the town and up to the jail.

There was no delay. A telephone pole had been picked up at the railroad yards and with forty men ranged on either side it was sent crashing through the heavy front door. The crowd poured in behind.

A sleepy old turnkey retreated into the office, from which he was yanked by the neck and told to open Jack Reed's cell. Within two minutes Jack was a free man being hurried away into the storm.

Of course there was a pursuit. The sheriff and three deputies followed in a sleigh and caught the rear of the column ten miles out of Kettle Falls. The tote road was narrow, and the lumberjacks, trudging steadily along, simply ignored the team behind them. The sheriff tried to force his horses through, but a few fists on their noses made them shy.

The sheriff and his men then got out and charged the column on foot. Quite obligingly, the lumberjacks opened up, and then suddenly closed and swallowed the officers. Revolvers were taken from them and hurled into the forest.

"Go back home where you belong," the sheriff was advised, and he and his men were tossed into the drifts.

The column marched on, unhurried, unafraid, Jack Reed at the head.

TWO days later a reluctant sheriff, secretly coerced by Norman Stark, made another journey to the Reed camps. He was accompanied now by a dozen deputies, heavily armed. The lumberjacks received them indifferently, refused to answer questions or even to cease working. At Camp Three the sheriff became desperate. There had been no trace of Jack Reed, so he determined to arrest some of his men for the jail delivery. He and his deputies entered the sleeping camp after supper and covered the crew with the rifles.

"Where's your warrant?" a lumberjack asked. "You can't arrest me, I ain't been in Kettle Falls since last fall." And from others came grim and ironic shouts: "Me neither!"

"Show me a warrant, givin' my name and what I'm wanted for and I'll go with you."

"Only thing I've done this winter is poison a few horses."

The sheriff became angry. "Go get 'em!" he barked.

The deputies moved forward uncertainly. The lumberjacks laughed with delight and shouted military commands.

"Shoulder arms!"

"Right about face!"

A deputy laid a hand on a man's shoulder and said "You're under arrest."

"Sure, and then what?" The lumberjack grinned up at his captor and settled back comfortably in his seat.

"March 'em out!" the sheriff shouted, but not a man arose.

Cocked weapons failed to have any effect. Most of the deputies had worked in logging camps and understood only too well the character of the men who sat grinning at them. On the surface was mirth, a rough and apparently good-natured jesting, but beneath was a solid steel frame. To pull a trigger in that

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crowded room meant a swift and terrible death for whoever fired the shot.

The sheriff's rage blinded him to this and he strode forward. A big lumberjack arose, stretched and yawned.

"I'm turnin' in," he said, and he removed his outer garments and rolled into his bunk. The others did likewise.

"Blow out the light when you leave, Sheriff," the last one called as he pulled the blankets up to his chin.

The sheriff returned to Kettle Falls without a prisoner and without being able to get any trace of Jack Reed. He left a deputy in each camp but that didn't last long. Cooks and flunkies refused to feed them. The crews barred them from the sleeping camps. The sheriff's men were starved and frozen out.

A new crisis now faced Jack Reed. He was free, but a fugitive, and it looked like he wouldn't be able to cut his logs and get them out on time to beat the Starks and win his bet. His credit was ruined. Banks refused to advance funds. Wholesalers would not ship supplies. The purchase of new horses, essential to the work, had taken the last of Jack's cash.

The crews knew little of this and did not understand all it meant, but they were a determined, ruthless outfit now. They'd cut and drive those logs, and beat the Starks, if they never did another thing in their lives. In each camp there was a close scrutiny of every man. Anyone who could not show a past in Jack Reed's employ was shadowed continuously. Teamsters stood guard in the stables. In Camp Three a man disappeared. He was tracked through the snow in the direction of the West Fork, and in the "turkey" left in his bunk a quantity of poison was found.

News of this, spread quickly through the four camps, was a big factor in stiffening the men for the new crisis. Food supplies were running low, but the lumberjacks accepted the curtailment of their sacred rations without a murmur.

BARRY PAGE was desperate. The tote teamsters had emptied the Kettle Falls warehouses. In a few days the camps would have to close. Barry went to town, and in Jack's office he found Dorothy Reed.

"How long can you hold out?" she asked.

"There is enough grub in the camps to last a week."

"[illegible]ll have to hurry then. Stay in town until you hear from me."

Dorothy was on the next southbound train. She returned three days later and placed twelve thousand dollars in cash in the hand of an astonished walking boss.

"Now it's up to you," she said shortly.

"But where did you get it?" he demanded.

"The family jewels," she laughed. "Why not? Dad always provided for us royally."

There was still a question in Barry's eyes.

"Oh, mother was willing," the girl said. "She knows she's responsible, in a way, because of that fool dinner she gave last June. Everything started then."

She was silent a moment, and tears appeared in her eyes.

"This—this other thing—the court business?" she asked. "Isn't there some way out for dad?"

"I can't see where," Barry answered frankly. "Sam Haney is dead. Deserved it, all right, but the law doesn't pay any attention to that."

"Isn't there some way to appeal the case?"

"I've talked to the lawyer. He said he could have delayed things, maybe get a new trial, but now with Jack out of jail everything's against him."

Dorothy's face was very white. She jumped to her feet with sudden decision and went out.

Barry spent the money like a miser, rushed food and hay and oats into the camps, yet he knew the end was only postponed. Jack Reed, as a fugitive, could not get credit or raise funds. Again Dorothy visited the office.

"Do you know where dad is?" she asked.

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"Of course."

"Then go get him. Tell him to give himself up and appear for sentence. The lawyer can't ask for a new trial until he does."

"But the Starks will hang him sure!" Barry protested.

"The Starks can save his life."

Her face was very white but she was smiling. Something about that smile, and the dead look in her eyes, wrung a cry from Barry.

"You mean—*young Stark?*"

Dot nodded. "It's my fault, in a way. It's all part of the wager. Norman wanted to marry me. Mother wanted it. That's why she gave that dinner last spring. And I encouraged dad to make the bet. I was so sure he could win, and I wanted to see the Starks beaten."

"But how can young Stark save Jack?"

"He's promised that. He says he discovered new evidence that will free dad. What he really means is that he owns the judge and district attorney."

She was still smiling, was being very brave, and rage blinded Barry.

"You can't do this!" he cried. "I'll kill Stark first."

Dot's eyes softened for a moment. There was something in them that Barry had never seen before, but it was fleeting.

"Do you want to kill Jack Reed, too?" she demanded harshly. "He must be saved, and I'm going to save him."

Chapter V

WHERE'S BLACK RIVER BEN?

BLACK RIVER BEN disappeared after Jack Reed's trial. Barry Page and Ned Arthur, foreman of Camp One, discovered that they knew very little about him, and also recalled that he had been rather intimately connected with the two events in which the Starks had triumphed.

First, he had planned that attack on Barney Malone's saloon, which had ended so disastrously for the Reed crew; and secondly, after admitting that he had taken money from the Starks, he had played a leading part in the horse poisoning and subsequent death of the poisoner.

"I'd 'a' sworn he was straight," Barry said.

"Talked too much," Ned retorted. "A man that likes to hear himself that way—well, there ain't enough truth in the world to stretch across all them words."

"But if he's gone, he's gone," Barry said, "and he won't bother us again."

Late next afternoon, as Barry plodded along the tote road between Camps Three and Four, Black River Ben burst out of the brush a hundred yards ahead and came running toward him.

"Never expected luck like this!" he exclaimed when he stopped in front of the walking boss. "Come on, and come a-runnin'!"

All Ned Arthur's suspicions flashed through Barry's mind, and here was a new one. In Jack's absence, Barry alone could carry on for the Reed forces. Now, far back in the deep pine woods, with night coming on, with the Stark camps on the West Fork only fifteen miles away, there was every indication of a new Stark plot.

"Yeah!" Barry snarled. "And soon's I step off the road I'll be slugged and packed off to the West Fork."

Ben started, and then his eyes lighted in understanding.

"Where've I been all this time, and just how much of that five hundred the Starks give me was I figurin' on earnin'—that's what you mean, eh?"

"That's it."

"It won't do any good my just telling you I'm on the square, will it?"

"No."

"Or telling what I want of you. You see, Barry, I ain't got a thing to back up my word."

"You need something."

"How about this? Would you take a chance for Jack Reed? Help him out of trouble, help him beat the Starks at loggin'?"

"If I'm sure it's a chance," Barry answered curtly.

"It's more'n a chance. It means Jack dodges hanging, and stays out of jail so he can cut and drive these logs and beat the Starks. If I could whip you I'd knock you down and make you come."

There was a sudden and unexpected passion in the last that startled Barry, and for the first time he saw that Ben's face

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was haggard, though his eyes burned fiercely.

"All right," Ben suddenly snarled as he turned and started running toward Camp Four. "I'll get somebody else."

Barry found himself believing. He'd take any kind of chance to clear Jack Reed and win that logging bet from the Starks. He ran after Ben, jumped into the sleigh track ahead of him.

"I'll go," he said. "What is it?"

"That's talking!" Ben cried delightedly. "And I'll tell it all later. We've got to travel first. Come along."

Ben turned into the trail by which he had reached the tote road and followed it toward the northwest. Barry, at his heels, saw that it was freshly broken, had been made only by Ben himself on his way to the road.

The sun had set and darkness came soon after.

"Way up the West Fork," Ben called over a shoulder. "Got to get there before daylight."

He strode on through the knee-deep snow, his long legs carrying him at a pace that kept Barry hustling, and yet Ben had just traveled the same route and, from the length of his stride as indicated in the snow, had done it swiftly. It is gruelling work, walking in deep snow without snowshoes, or with them, and nothing could have been more convincing to Barry that the big lumberjack was on the square.

"HOW'S this going to help Jack?" Barry Page asked after they had gone a mile.

"Prove he didn't murder that teamster," Ben called over his shoulder. "Then he'll be free to carry on with loggin' and beat the Starks."

"But he's been convicted of murder, and the man's dead. Besides, you and Ned Arthur saw it."

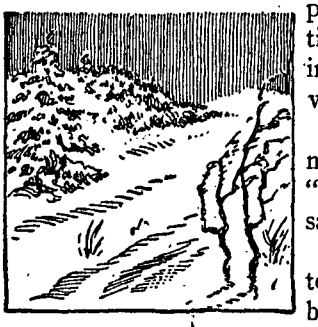
"We thought we did, is all."

"You're crazy!"

"Maybe so. I can tell for sure when we get there."

Ben was panting as he talked, and striding on as swiftly as ever. Barry felt the pace, and it was becoming more difficult in the darkness with the footing less secure. Barry ceased asking questions, but his confidence in Ben was not affected. Rather it grew as they struggled forward in the darkness, beneath the dark pines, across frozen streams, on and on into a wilderness untouched by loggers and inhabited only by their forerunners, the trappers.

The pace slackened. Ben had been traveling all day and, big and strong as he was, the snow held him back. Yet he kept plodding on until four o'clock in the morning, when he stopped.



"Now watch me," he said, "and then do the same thing."

He walked up to some thick brush, came back, then ran forward and burst through the top of the brush with a long, high leap. Barry followed, and found himself on a well packed snowshoe trail.

"That's the way I left," Ben said. "Got to be careful of tracks around here."

He led on for a hundred yards, when a bend in the trail disclosed a small log cabin.

"I don't think there'll be anybody at home," Ben whispered, "but we can't take chances. The bunk is on the side opposite the door. We'll sneak up, bust in and smother anybody who may be asleep."

But the cabin was empty. Ben lit a lantern and started a fire in the tiny cookstove.

"Ain't had a thing to eat since yesterday morning," he said as he began to cut steaks from a frozen leg of venison with a hand saw. "And we can't have a fire after daylight."

Barry had been looking around. "This place belongs to a trapper, eh?"

"Jed Gaffner."

Barry started. "If he catches us here—That fellow's bad, Ben."

"Sure, but there's slight chance of his coming today, and we got to have some sleep."

"All right, but what's this got to do with Jack Reed?"

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Ben talked as he cooked the steak and made biscuits. "I was there when Jack beat up Haney, that teamster who poisoned the horses. Jack was sore, of course, and he did a good job of it, though nothing to get excited over. None of us thought anything about Haney's dying until the sheriff came for Jack.

"Mind my telling you then how that sort of beatin' don't kill a man? I couldn't believe it, but a coroner's jury said it was so, and I had to believe it. Didn't think any more about it until the trial. Then it struck me that the district attorney knew quite a lot about what happened in our office at Camp One that morning. He asked us questions that showed it. Just little things, you know. I thought it was funny at the time, but I didn't really get to thinking about it until after the verdict, and then I began asking myself how he knew so much. There was just Jack and Ned Arthur and me there, and Haney.

"Thinkin' about that led me to thinkin' about other things. There was the testimony of the halfbreed who hauled the fellow over to Stark's camp. It was all against Jack, of course, but I remembered how the fellow didn't come back with his dog team when Jack did, and how I heard the bells on his harness jingling past in the middle of the night. And Norman Stark testified to being in their first camp when Haney was brought in. His just being there made me do some more thinkin'.

THE halfbreed was livin' at the same hotel I was at during the trial, and after the verdict he stayed on. Got some whisky somehow and, bein' a halfbreed, he stayed in his room to do his drinkin'. The next day I paid him a visit and we got grand and drunk together. Leastways, he thought I did. We got quite chummy, and when he ran out o' booze I got him some more and after a while I asked him casual like why he was so late coming back that night. Not right out, you know, but so he wouldn't suspect.

"Just the minute I sprung that I saw a funny look in his eyes and he said Stark had gave him a drink and he had hung around hoping for another. So I waited an hour before I came back to that question."

"You mean the halfbreed killed Haney?" Barry interrupted excitedly.

"That's the way I began to see it. I helped lash that fellow Haney on the toboggan when Jack took him over to the Stark's camp and he didn't look to me like a man who was thinkin' o' dyin'. And knowin' young Stark was there, and seeing the advantage of him of having Jack out of the way, I knew there'd been some shenanigan."

"But how we going to prove that?" Barry asked.

"It's what bothered me," said Ben. "and once more I led the halfbreed around to his being late. This time he was far gone, and he saw me as his best friend, and he tells me he did a little job for Stark with his dog team. I thought he was lyin' because I couldn't see how the dogs would come into what I was getting at, but I let him talk.

"He tells me the job was going out into the slash about two miles and hauling in a teamster who'd been hurt. It was late, he says, and the whole crew had come in and was eating. The foreman had found the team coming to camp without a driver and told Stark in the office, and they went out together. It was late, most turnin' in time, when they got back, and then the foreman took the halfbreed and his dogs and went for the teamster.

"The foreman said the teamster was hurt and couldn't walk and he loaded him onto the toboggan and they hauled him to camp. Lights were out then, except in the office. Young Stark came out and says the fellow ought to go to a hospital, and he tells the foreman to rouse out a teamster to haul him to Kettle Falls.

"The halfbreed was anxious to get home and he went back to the toboggan. The office door was open and he saw the teamsters fellow's face showin' in the light, was all blood, just smashed in. They think one of his horses kicked him. The breed said he felt so sorry for the fellow he bent down to shift him into an easier position and found he was stiff. Dead. Just then Stark came to the door of the office and ordered him away. Stark and

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the foreman carried the teamster inside and the halfbreed came home."

Ben straightened from taking the biscuits from the oven and grinned at Barry.

"You got to hand it to this Norman Stark," he said. "He thinks quick, that lad. And he'll do anything to beat Jack Reed at loggin' and win that bet."

Barry was staring blankly. "What's all this got to do with Jack Reed?" he demanded.

"There wasn't a word said in the trial about a teamster being hurt by a horse, was there? And I went around to the hospital and asked about him, lettin' on he was a friend, and they said he hadn't been brought there."

Ben stopped and grinned again. "Barry, you know loggin' but not much else. Don't you see it? Stark sent the dead teamster to town—actually the one that the horse had kicked. But he claimed it was Haney, the one Jack Reed beat up. Nobody knew about the switch but Stark, the foreman of their first camp, and the timekeeper. Nobody else in the camp knew about the teamster being kicked in the face, because the crew had gone to bed when he was brought in."

"Then the other one—Haney!" Barry exclaimed. "Where is he?"

"They hid him out, of course; and that's what we're here for."

BARRY PAGE was all for action now. "Where is he? What we wastin' time for?"

"Sit down and let's eat," Ben advised. "I'm so hollow all I need to be a barrel is the hoops. I could see that the halfbreed didn't know about switchin' the dead man for the beat-up one, and yet he had been paid by Stark to keep his mouth shut about bringin' in the teamster. So I couldn't get any hint there as to what they'd done with Haney.

"Reasonin' it out, I could see that Stark wouldn't want to send him out of the camps for fear he'd be recognized. Even if Haney left on a train, there would be the chance of somebody seeing him. On the other hand, Stark couldn't keep him at that camp, or the other three. Too many of the Stark men were sore and quitting, and there'd be talk. So I figured they kept Haney hid in the woods.

"I left Kettle Falls then, hitting the Stark tote road at night and sleepin' in the hay in their stables days. I made a circle around every camp, hunting for tracks. It took quite a while, for I couldn't afford to have any of them see me, and it wasn't until I got to Camp Four that I found the trail."

"Where is Haney now?" Barry demanded impatiently.

"He's in another trapper's cabin about five miles from here. Jed Gaffner and the other trapper are keepin' him there. Guess Stark ain't taking any chances on Haney getting loose, 'cause that'd spoil his plans completely and maybe give Jack Reed the only chance he needs to win that loggin' bet."

Barry did not speak for a moment. He was thinking of Dorothy Reed and what she had told him in their last interview.

"Where is this place?" he demanded harshly. "Let's get going."

"You'd get shot soon's you showed up. Gaffner's bad, and he's got a rifle all the time. So's this other trapper."

"You been there?"

"Scouted around all one day. You'd think Gaffner was guarding a gold mine. That's why I came out to get help."

"But what are you planning on?" Barry demanded.

"We'll get a sleep here today, taking turns. I need it bad. One'll stand guard, watching that trail. If Gaffner comes, we can jump him easy. If he don't, we go to that other shack tonight and surprise 'em. Then we can take Haney back to Kettle Falls, clear Jack Reed of that murder charge, and get busy loggin'. There ain't nothin' going to stop us from winning that bet from the Starks, once Jack Reed can start in cuttin' timber proper."

Barry argued for immediate action,

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though he did not tell the reason for his impatience, but Black River Ben settled the question by rolling into the bunk and going to sleep.

"Wash the dishes, leave everything natural, keep the draft open so the fire will burn out quick, and don't look away from that window when it gets daylight," he said.

Ben slept until noon, when he wakened and relieved Barry. After dark they built a fire and cooked another meal. Barry was impatient to start but Ben argued against that. "We'll walk it in an hour and a half," he said, "And we don't want to get there before eleven o'clock."

At nine-thirty Barry blew out the light and opened the door. Ben had stooped to close the stove draft. As he crouched there he heard a thud and glanced up to see Barry's body, outlined against the snow, sway to the floor.

"You other one, step out here!" a hard voice sounded. "I got a gun on you, and if you know Jed Gaffner you know how he can use one."

Gaffner, who had killed thousands of red deer for the logging camps, was famous in the pine woods for his skill with a rifle, yet Ben did not move.

"You damn fool!" the trapper snorted. "You're blinded by losin' the light but I'm not. I'm watching you, and I give you one more chance to come out."

Ben obeyed, stepping over Barry's body.

"Toss this other'n back inside and close the door," Gaffner said. "He may not freeze before I get back. Now you take that trail and walk right along."

He indicated the path by which Ben and Barry had come, and which led, Ben knew, to the Starks' upper camp, about four miles away.

"I don't know who you are or what you want," Gaffner said, "But I'll soon find out. And I'm taking no chances."

Chapter VI

TURNING THE TABLES

FOR all his adventurous career, Black River Ben had never been caught in a situation like this. At least, not when so much had depended upon it. Now not only his own life but the lives of Jack Reed and Barry Page hung in the balance.

So Ben started to think. Big as he was, and delighting in personal combat, it was in using his brains, in outwitting the other fellow, that he found the greatest challenge. And here, Ben Black knew, only brains could win.

He was opposed by a crafty mind, one long schooled in outwitting creatures of the wild, in snap shots at small parts of leaping deer, in suspicion and constant caution. Even Gaffner's reputation with the rifle was a factor against Ben. The lumberjack accepted it as a deadly element in the situation.

They went on, Gaffner insisting upon a swift pace.

"Sooner I get back, less liable that friend of your'n is to freeze to death," he warned Ben referring to the unconscious Barry Page. "When I hit a man with a rifle butt, he goes down to stay."

Ben tried his ready tongue, but the trapper was not interested in anything he had to suggest, least of all in the lumberjack's elaborate explanation of his presence in the cabin.

And the miles dropped behind them. They were in the slash now, following a skidding trail, then a logging road which soon brought them out in a broad, clear space on the West Fork. The Stark camp was not far away, and, once he reached it, Ben's case would be hopeless.

The trail took them toward great rollways, tiers of logs piled high from the river bank back almost to the brush.

"Wait a moment," Gaffner commanded. "I don't want you dodgin' among these logs."

Ben felt the muzzle of the rifle between his shoulder blades. "Go on," was the command. "With your hands up."

The lumberjack's brain had been striving desperately, and producing nothing. Now it clicked so surely and so swiftly he acted on the instant. His body pivoted, his left elbow struck the rifle barrel, his right fist caught Gaffner on the jaw, the force of the turn behind it.

Sometime in that instant the rifle had been discharged, but, although the weapon was cocked and Gaffner's finger was on the

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trigger, the bullet had not even touched Ben's stag shirt. Ben picked up the rifle, pumped a fresh cartridge into the barrel and stood ready. In a moment Gaffner lifted his head.

"Get up!" Ben said harshly. "Maybe I'm not the walnut cracker you are with one of these things, but I can always use it as a club."

He drove the trapper before him, back on the trail by which he had come. Gaffner had been cold and ruthless, Ben was aflame. He spurred his dazed captive pitilessly for four miles, halted him at the cabin door.

"Barry!" he called as he threw the door open. There was no answer.

Ben drove Gaffner inside, ordered him to light the lantern. The dim glow showed that the cabin was empty.

Again the lumberjack's big fist darted out, and again the trapper dropped. When he came to a little later he was bound with the trap chains and swathed in blankets. The cabin was dark and empty.

BARRY PAGE had regained consciousness on the floor of the cabin. His head was afire, but through it shot the one thought that he must get on his feet.

He did so, after a terrific effort. The cabin spun and its floor rocked, but he got hold of himself, made a dash for the door as it whirled past and was outside. The cold air helped—it was below zero—and he made out the trail by which he and Ben had come, then found another. It led away in the opposite direction, and Barry took it.

His head still ached terrifically, and blood was running down from a torn scalp, but he kept on, striding along with barely enough consciousness to keep on the smooth snowshoe trail.

He felt better as the miles dragged behind. He believed he was only crawling, but he made fair time, and in less than an hour and a half he found a cabin across his path.

Barry stood there, swaying slightly, breathing heavily. He saw that he faced the door and, summoning all his strength, he lurched forward, thrust it open and lunged inside.

"That you, Jed?" a sleepy voice asked, and Barry flung himself toward it.

It was a small cabin, and dark. To Barry, it seemed filled with men. He could feel their bodies, the shock of blows, but he did not mind. It was firearms that he feared and he struck out blindly whenever a gasping breath indicated the proximity of a foe.

The ring has seen many a battler slugging away when he was out on his feet. Barry Page was that sort. His head roared with pain. His legs and arms were liquid lead. And he continued to drive his fists into hard bodies and against unseen faces. He felt that he was fighting a dozen men.

Suddenly there was silence, and emptiness. Barry swayed for a moment, then crumpled across a still form on the floor.

Five minutes later Blank River Ben struck a match and stared at the wreck of the cabin.

"Hell let out for noon!" he chuckled. "Wildcats and mules and bandsaws all rolled into one ordinary sized man. If he was feelin' really fit, I wonder what he'd do to an army."

Ben lighted the lantern. One of the men on the floor sat up. It was Haney, the horse poisoning teamster, and Ben quickly bound his hands at his back.

"You're sort o' precious, feller," Ben said. "Don't worry. We'll take the best of care of you."

The other man showed signs of life. It was the trapper, and Ben bound him securely and then turned to Barry, bathed his face and laid him on the bunk. He searched the cabin, found two rifles and some ammunition. He saw that one was loaded, hurled the other far into the brush outside and scattered the cartridges in the snow. When he returned, Barry Page was on his feet.

"Let's start," Jack Reed's walking boss said. "We got to hurry."

"We're all right now," Ben answered

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carelessly. "And you need a rest, feller."

"We got to hurry!" Barry retorted harshly. "We got to get Haney to town, so that we can clear Jack and get started proper with our logging. We'll beat those Starks so bad they won't know what's happened."

"But Jack ain't even sentenced yet," said Ben.

Barry's legs were unsteady but there was a fire in his eyes that startled Ben. "It ain't just Jack!" he exclaimed harshly. "Get out o' here! How we going to work this?"

They had two prisoners, the trapper who lay bound on the floor and Haney; and at the other cabin was Jed Gaffner.

"We can't leave these two trappers, for they'll get to Stark's camp and cut us off," Ben said. "Leavin' 'em tied is the same as murder. They'd freeze to death. And all they're doing is take the Starks' money for this job. Chances are, they don't know what it's all about."

"You think Haney don't—" Barry began.

"Shut up!" Ben snapped. "You talk too much, and if you want action, and can walk twenty-five miles through the snow, all right. I'll fix this lad and Gaffner so they won't bother. You able to make it to Camp Three?"

"I'd make it to Kettle Falls!" Barry retorted. "Get busy."

Black River Ben examined the buckskin thongs which bound the wrists of the two men and adjusted them to his satisfaction. He jerked down the levers of the rifle he had kept and of the one he had brought from Gaffner's cabin and satisfied himself there was a cartridge in each barrel. One weapon he handed to Barry.

"Don't know whether you can handle one of the things," he said, "but if worst comes to worst, you've still got two fists, and they'll do about as well. You take the lead now and we'll coax these two along between us."

BEN'S scheme worked all right, except that they did not travel swiftly enough to suit Barry. The walking boss strode on ahead, repeatedly outdistanced the others and turned to snarl at them for not walking faster. A demon seemed to possess him, and Ben wondered, not only because he did not see how flesh and blood could be driven to such exertion but because he did not understand what lay back of it. An unknown factor in a situation bothered Black River Ben far more than imminent danger.

At Gaffner's cabin Barry stood guard over the two prisoners while Ben went inside, lighted the lantern and rebound the trapper's wrists behind him. Then he removed the chains from his ankles and lifted him from the bunk.

"We're going for a little trip," he said. "There's two of us, and we've each got a rifle. So behave."

The procession went on. There were five now, Barry in the lead, the three prisoners in the center, Ben bringing up the rear. They turned off the snowshoe trail that led to the Stark camp and pushed through the brush to the path Ben and Barry had made on their way from the East Fork.

It was more strenuous going now, and the prisoners had difficulty in keeping their balance when their hands were bound behind them. Repeatedly Barry tore on ahead, only to be halted by a warning call from Ben. He waited, cursing Haney and the trappers, urging Ben to drive them faster.

No one was in the best of shape. Gaffner, Haney and the second trapper had been knocked unconscious. For a week or more Ben Black had been traveling long hours in deep snow, going without food, sleeping in stables. Barry Page, suffering from a crack on the head with a rifle butt and from that terrific battle in the second cabin, had been the most seriously hurt of all.

Yet Barry had more energy than all the others. He insisted on changing places with Ben, cursed and threatened the prisoners, urged them on with kicks and thrusts of the rifle.

They had gone about five miles when Ben halted the column. He took a knife from Gaffner's pocket, opened it and drove it into a birch tree beside the trail.

"Mark that down," he said to the two trappers. "You'll need to remember it."

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They went on. Daylight came and Haney asked for a chance to rest.

"You'll have nothing else to do pretty soon," Barry snarled. "Keep going."

Ben saw little chance for escape or of danger to Barry and himself. The prisoners were securely bound, they were nearing exhaustion, and now, in daylight, they could not even make a break for liberty.

Yet there was that possibility, and he knew Gaffner would always be formidable. They had marched about thirteen miles from Gaffner's cabin, he called another halt.

"Walk on ahead, Haney," he commanded. "Gaffner, you and your pardner can go back now. We don't need you. When you get to that knife stickin' in the birch you can cut each other loose. And keep away from the East Fork and Kettle Falls. They're not healthy places for Stark men."

Barry gave little heed to Ben's plan. "All right, Haney," he barked. "We go on, and we go fast now."

The walking boss joined Ben at the rear and urged the lone prisoner along. Haney stumbled, caught himself with difficulty in the deep snow, but always the remorseless Barry was prodding him with the muzzle of a rifle.

It was nearly noon when they reached the tote road and at once they turned south toward Camp Three. They walked more swiftly on the smooth sleigh trail and were in camp at two o'clock. Ben and Haney sank exhausted to seats in the cook camp but Barry, after ordering a meal for all three, went out in search of the foreman.

AN HOUR later Haney and his captors were fed, warm and comfortable and climbing onto a tote sleigh bound southward. Two husky lumberjacks guarded the horse poisoner while Barry and Ben rolled in the blankets, burrowed into the hay and went to sleep.

A stop was made at Camp Two, where the foreman, after a word from Barry, ran off into the woods, to return soon with Jack Reed. Jack saw the prisoner, Haney, stared without comprehension, and then started furiously for him.

"Hold on, boss!" Ben shouted as he threw himself between them. "Don't spoil that face again. It's got to be identified, you know. Then you'll be clear and all set to show us how to cut and drive logs and beat them Starks."

He led the lumberman aside, whispered to him, and then they climbed onto the sleigh and went on. It was dark before they reached Camp One.

Jack suggested that they wait there until morning, and Barry's fury burst afresh against the delay. The blood from his ripped scalp, black now, still streaked his face. His mouth was swollen, his eyes blazed from great hollows.

"All right," Jack Reed said, and grinned, when the outburst ended. "But what's the matter with you? *You* haven't dodged a noose."

They took half a dozen teamsters with them, men who knew Haney and could identify him as the man who had worked for three months in Camp One and had been caught poisoning the horses. The old marks of Jack's beating still showed on the fellow's face, and his reddish hair and a slight squint in one eye were unmistakable.

Ben took these teamsters aside and talked to them, as he had talked to Jack Reed, and a mile down the tote road he stopped the team and called the halfbreed from his cabin.

"You're going to Kettle Falls," Ben announced. "Climb aboard."

It was late when they started, and it was nine o'clock in the morning when the four-horse team plodded up the main street of Kettle Falls. One of the first men they met was the sheriff.

Black River Ben and Jack Reed sat on the seat with the driver; Jack because he was coming back a free man and wanted all his townsmen to know it, Ben because he did not wish to miss any of the drama. The sheriff saw Jack and immediately shouted to the teamster to halt. He had

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drawn a revolver and now he ran out to the sleigh.

"You're my prisoner, Reed," he barked. "Climb down."

One of Ben's big hands shot out and struck the weapon into the snow. The other caught the sheriff by the collar.

"Little man," Ben laughed, "you've made enough mistakes about this. Guess I'll take care of you so you won't make any more," and he lifted the kicking, struggling sheriff into the sleigh and held him in his lap.

"Drive on, Billy," he said to the tote teamster. "Straight to the courthouse."

At the next corner they stopped again. A girl and a man stood on the sidewalk, and the girl had screamed, once.

Barry Page heard, and was out of the sleigh. The man was Norman Stark, and Barry rushed blindly toward him.

But a crowd was gathering. Dorothy Reed ran out to her father. Stark slipped back among the onlookers. Someone tripped Barry. When he got to his feet again, Stark was gone.

Dorothy reached up to kiss her father. Barry ran out and roughly jerked her away, stared into her eyes.

"In time?" he asked.

"We just got the license," the girl answered, and then she cried. "But there's nothing else, Barry! Now, with dad back ——"

"Climb aboard!" he cried exultantly. "Drive ahead, Billy!"

The word spread swiftly that Jack Reed was back, and a crowd followed to the courthouse. There Black River Ben took charge. He climbed down, with the sheriff in his arms, and ordered the others to follow, then strode up the steps

INSIDE he found a sign, DISTRICT ATTORNEY, and kicked the door open. The prosecuter arose angrily from his desk. "Bring him along, men!" Ben ordered, and he went out, still carrying the sheriff.

There was another sign at the end of the hall, JUDICIAL CHAMBERS, and again Ben burst in, the crowd of lumberjacks holding Haney and the district attorney and the halfbreed at his heels Dorothy and her father bringing up the rear.

The judge, too, arose in fury.

"Sit down," Ben commanded. "And I'll do the talking. It'll save time."

"This is an outrage!" protested the judge. "Sheriff——"

"It's been an outrage, all right," Ben grinned, "and now you're going to square it. Sit down. Just pretend you're in your courtroom, Judge, and holdin' a trial, because that's what this is."

People were crowding about the door and Ben shut and locked it. The district attorney and the sheriff joined the judge in irate protest but when Ben strode back and confronted them he was no longer smiling.

"Shut up, you three!" he snarled, and Ben's height and bulk compelled obedience. "You," and he pointed to Haney, "step out here! Judge, ask this man who he is, where he's been working and anything else that's happened this winter."

"I'll have you jailed for this outrage!" the judge shouted.

"You and the district attorney did the outragin'," Ben retorted. "I'm givin' you a chance to square it. And listen!" he leaned down and whispered in the judge's ear.

The magistrate started. "What!" he exclaimed, turning to Ben's prisoner. "Are you *Sam Haney?*"

"Sure, but I want to tell you——"

"The man Jack Reed so brutally attacked in his logging camp?"

"Well, he beat me up a bit but——"

The judge whirled upon the district attorney. "What does this mean?" he demanded.

"Norman Stark told me the dead man brought from his camp was Sam Haney; and, of course——"

"But the coroner's jury saw the body," the judge interrupted.

"I think I can explain that," Ben Black said, and he dragged the frightened halfbreed forward. "Now you tell what you know."

It took some prompting, but the significance of the story was quickly grasped.

"I haven't told Haney anything," Ben said, "and he don't even know yet he's

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supposed to be dead and Jack Reed is his murderer. I can bring down fifty men who'll swear Haney is the fellow Jack Reed beat up, and you can always dig up the lad the horse kicked to death.

"Now," and Ben suddenly leaned across the judge's desk, "I don't know the legal riggin' you're supposed to use to straighten all this out, but you can just forget it. All you've got to do now is tell this squirt of a sheriff to keep his hands off Jack Reed and Jack Reed's men and to quit playin' the Stark game or we'll come to town and take him and his jail and roll 'em into the river. There's logs to cut and drive and no time for legal monkeyshines."

"Of course! Of course!" the judge said hastily. "There has been a grave miscarriage of justice and I am glad to see Mister Reed walk out of this room a free man. It is all very remarkable, especially the part you seem to have played. Who, may I ask, are you?"

"Me!" Black River Ben grinned. "Judge, I'm the best damned canthook man in the State o' Wisconsin."

Chapter VII

SPIKED GATES

JACK REED led his men down to Barney Malone's place.

"Barney," he said, "clear out. Take your bartender with you. Leave the front door open and throw the key into the snow. Tell any lumberjack you see that we've bought your place for the day and drinks are free. But if you see a lawyer or a judge or a sheriff, or anybody else that never had on a calked shoe, tell 'em to keep off River Street. The loggers own it, and they'll tear the collar off every boiled shirt they see."

An hour passed, a hilarious hour that echoed as far as the business district of Kettle Falls, and then Black River Ben discovered he was hungry.

"None of us has et since last night," he said.

"Huh!" Jack Reed snorted. "I don't feed my men, eh?"

He tore off the white jacket he had donned when he took charge behind the bar and went out. Ben slipped into his place, conscientiously ringing up the price of every drink on the cash register and then taking the money from the drawer and paying each man the exact price of what he consumed.

"A lumberjack's idea o' heaven!" he chuckled. "What'll you have, gents?"

"Skie!" came the chorus, but Ben made no move to serve them.

"I'm disappointed in you lads," he said mournfully. "Gettin' paid for ten-cent drinks when champagne costs four dollars a bottle."

He set a quart before each man at the bar, rang up the total and extracted the money from the till. The wine was not chilled and a sham battle ensued. When this ended the lumberjacks lined up at the bar.

"Little rye for a chaser, Ben!" they shouted. "Where's anybody get the fun o' drinkin' that stuff?"

Jack Reed returned and ordered every man into the street. There, drawn up along the sidewalk, were a dozen sleighs, each with a driver.

"Pile in!" he yelled as he took his place in the first. "Don't feed my men, eh?"

They drove uptown, circled three times around the courthouse square, Jack directing his driver, the others following. All Kettle Falls lined the sidewalks and cheered. The prancing horses swept out of the business district and up a long avenue of fine homes. At a big stone gate the leader turned in and a few moments later Jack Reed was ushering the lumberjacks into his home.

Dorothy and her mother greeted them and led them at once into the big dining room, where a table was set. Linen, silver and cut glass swept the feet out from under Barney Malone's whisky. A dozen sober lumberjacks slipped awkwardly into their places and dead silence reigned. Mrs. Reed looked down the length of the table and understood.

"Boys," she said, "my dad was the first

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man to drive the old Wisconse. I was rubbing undershirts across a washboard when Jack Reed first saw me, and getting paid five cents each by the river pigs who owned 'em. I've strayed a bit since then, but I've come back. You lads dig in as if you were in camp, because this is still a logger's house, and only loggers are welcome."

At the other end of the table Black River Ben arose.

"Ma'am," he said, "you wear calked shoes."

Dorothy appeared with a champagne bottle and they watched her askance as she went separately from place to place. Then they saw the familiar red of rye trickle into their glasses and glanced up into her sparkling eyes. After that the dinner was a huge success, and loaded knives darted into wide open mouths.

THAT was Jack Reed's answer to the Starks. Jack was a logger. He had made a wager that he would be first to get his drive to the forks of the Red Deer and he intended to win by cutting and driving his timber. Even Black River Ben, who loved intrigue, failed to see the big advantage that lay in Jack's hands through prosecution of Norman Stark for his part in bringing the murder charge.

Stark saw it clearly, that morning when Haney was brought to town, and he got out of Kettle Falls, and out of the State, as quickly as possible. But nothing happened. The lawyer who had defended Jack Reed in the trial wanted to bring both civil and criminal action against Stark, but Jack laughed at him.

"I ain't got the time for that nonsense," the lumberman said. "He tried a dirty trick, but it didn't work, did it? We beat him, didn't we? All right."

"But you could cripple him seriously," the lawyer insisted.

"Listen here!" Jack retorted. "Stark and his dad claimed cuttin' and drivin' logs was too easy to bother about, that anybody could do it. I'm going to prove they're dead wrong. I'm going back to the camps and finish cutting my fifty million feet, and then I'm going to drive it downriver and get to the forks first. This other—this law stuff—that ain't loggin'. It's kid's tricks."

And in the morning after their arrival in Kettle Falls, back to the woods went Jack and his men. They took with them the information that the Starks were behind schedule, might not get the required amount of logs to the river bank, and they dug in to make their own scale a full sixty million.

"That'll make up for what they don't get," Jack chuckled.

Warren Stark came up from Milwaukee. He did not go into the woods, but he hired a new walking boss, placed new foremen in each camp, and evidently he squared things with the district attorney, for in April Norman Stark returned and resumed control.

Meanwhile a constant stream of lumberjacks was going into the Starks camps. "They got three crews," the Reed tote teamsters reported. "One goin' in, one comin' out, and another workin'."

Opposed to this demoralization and ruthless driving, the Reed crews heaped up the rollways. Foremen remained in their offices and let the camps run themselves. Timekeepers forgot how to make out time for a man.

Spring was late, and it saved the Starks. The scalers, provided in the elaborate agreement drawn up and signed by the contesting parties, were finally able to report fifty million feet on the West Fork, but the last logs were hauled on go-devils in melting snow. Jack Reed's scale showed sixty-one million.

"Little more to drive but what's that to us?" Jack grinned. "Bankin' logs is only a crude detail, eh?"

"The easy part o' loggin' kept them humpin' so they didn't have time for mischief," Black River Ben said. "Wonder what they'll try now."

"What can they try?" Jack retorted. "Drivin's drivin', ain't it? I know what my men can do, and it ain't hard to tell what their bunch o' scum is worth. Nothing can lick us now."

"There's a lot at stake," Barry Page said. "You stand to lose a fortune, and so do the Starks. They aren't the kind that will lie down and watch you win."

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"And this East Fork's never been drove," Ben added. "It's going to be mean. They've got an edge there."

Jack laughed. He was confident, but not careless. Driving a river was life itself to Jack Reed. He welcomed a difficult stream, but he took every precaution to drive it successfully. "Watch me!" he said.

THE East Fork drive began with the thunder of broken out rollways and the shrill whoops of the crew. For years these men had brought logs down Kettle River, as ugly a stream as there was in the State. Spring after spring they had trod timber that bore only the bark mark of Jack Reed. They had never known a hung drive. In their world they were unbeatable.

These were Jack Reed's men, but they were of the same stamp as Jack himself. His wager was theirs, his pride the same that actuated them. Like Jack, their purpose was to show the Starks that skill and experience and loyalty were necessary to get logs from stump to mill. Once the logs were in the boom, they would seek out the Stark crew and settle their grudge.

Almost at once the drive stopped. As soon as the first logs reached Number Three dam, Jack ordered the gates lifted and the sluicing to begin. But the gates would not lift. The dam watcher struggled with rack and pinion and could not budge them. At last he went upstream to find Barry Page.

"The gates lifted when we put 'em in last fall," Barry said, "and they were made to work. I saw to that."

He hurried downriver, passing three rollways being broken out, but so confident was he that the drive would go on he did not order the men to cease tumbling more logs into the stream.

At the dam he tugged at the lever but with no more success than the watchman. The river was high, was piling up faster than the spillway could take care of it, and a sheet of water flowed over the gates. Barry tried loosening them by tapping with an ax. An examination showed that the mechanism was in perfect order.

The ice had just gone out. There was still snow in heavy timber on north hillsides, but Barry jumped down onto the apron and crawled under the curtain of freezing water. A glance showed what had happened. A closer examination told that those gates could be lifted only after being shattered. Ten-inch spikes had been driven by enemy hands through the bottom timbers into the heavy logs of the apron.

Soaked and shivering, Barry crawled out and climbed from the sluiceway. "Go get Jack and tell him to come down here with his buggy quick's he can," he barked at the dam watcher. "Take the road, and if you meet a tote team tell the driver to come here and wait for me."

Barry himself ran up the river trail for two miles until he came to a rollway that the crew was just starting to break out. He

stopped the work, sent a messenger upstream with orders that no more logs were to be put in the water, and scattered the others along the stream to "tend out," to prevent the formation of jams. He took half a dozen drivers with him back to the dam.

The tote teamster was there and, with a man, was at once dispatched to Camp Three for certain tools and supplies.

"If you're not back here in three hours, you get your time," Barry said.

Jack Reed drove up a few moments later. "Why ain't you sluicin' here?" he demanded.

"Gates are spiked to the apron," Barry answered quietly. "Young Stark is back on the job."

Jack stared at his walking boss for a long moment.

"All right," he said quietly, "Chop 'em out, tear 'em out, blow 'em out. Logs got to go through."

"Can't," Barry answered. "This is a flood dam and we'll need the water later, and need it bad."

Jack walked to the sluiceways and studied them. "There's room to put new gates below," he said.

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"I've sent for the stuff. We won't lose much more'n a day. You'd better go on downriver and see what's happened at the other two dams, and take some men along to watch 'em night and day. This ain't a log drive we've started on. It's a war."

Jack did not comment as he turned away to his buggy, nor did the river drivers who had overheard. But that statement of Barry's traveled swiftly upriver, from rollway to rollway, out across the logs floating down to the back water above Number Three dam.

And war it was, even if Jack Reed had refused to see it. Barry Page acted immediately upon his own responsibility. He chose four men who could find their way about in the woods and told them they were to act as scouts.

"Go over to the West Fork and watch what they're doing," were his instructions. "Two stick to the rear, the other two below. Get word to me every day. And I don't want to know just how fast Stark's drive is going, but I'd like to hear how it might get into trouble."

Their eyes lighted at that and they hurried away. When they went to camp to get supplies they didn't keep too quiet about Barry's instructions, and the news spread that the Reed outfit was getting ready to strike back.

CHAPTER VIII

DYNAMITE!

SPIKING the gates of Number Three dam had not been a feeble effort to cause trouble. A day and a half was required to build new gates below the others in the two sluiceways and tear out the old ones. Tools and materials were scarce and it had to be a makeshift job.

And then, as soon as sluicing began, a jam formed a mile upriver. Ordinarily, this would not have happened. If sluicing had begun when planned, breaking out those last three rollways would have resulted in a steady flow of logs that could have been easily handled. Now they blocked the stream.

Jack Reed returned from the lower dams to report they had not been tampered with.

"Which goes to show that somebody with brains is working for the Starks," Barry said. "They'd only be wasting spikes, knowing we'd find out in plenty of time, and blocking this dam could cause us the most trouble. See how it worked out."

It was three days after the new gates were opened before the jam was broken and logs were again moving down stream. For eighteen hours on each of those days Jack Reed's men labored terrifically. In that shallow water, in a lowbanked stream, it was not a question of getting out the key log and letting the whole mass of logs go through of their own momentum and with a head of water behind them. Each piece of timber had to be pried loose and dragged across a gravel bar, and it was slow, back-breaking work.

"I told you it was brains," Barry said to Jack. "Somebody figured that to a minute; somebody who knew just how we'd drive. Five days gone. If he does that once or twice more we're done for."

"Well, what about it?" Jack demanded gruffly.

"You run the drive," Barry said. "I'm going to have a look at this West Fork. Nobody ever won a fight by just bein' hit."

Barry was gone three days, and he took Black River Ben with him. They drove down their own tote road until near the forks, then walked across to the West Fork and upstream. Stark's crew was still near the headwaters and there was no one on the river. Neither Barry nor Ben had ever seen this branch of the Red Deer and they followed the banks, studying it closely.

"They won't have half the natural grief we will," Ben said. "It's up to us to improve on nature."

"And there's the place to begin," Barry added.

They had reached the first of the Stark rollways. It stood on a high bank, and downstream a hundred yards was a gravel bar that formed two equal channels.

Ben grinned. "Later, when they open the dam above here, they'll have enough water to carry over that. But right now—"

They had brought peavies, "not knowing but what we'd have to roll a windfall out

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o' the road," as Ben expressed it, and it was no trouble to start the great pile of logs. These boomed and thundered and jackstrawed into the river, where the current carried them down to the gravel bar. Some flowed past on either side, but a few caught and soon formed a barrier.

Barry and Ben quickly ducked into the brush and made their way on upriver. Once they stopped and kept perfectly quiet while they watched a man hurrying in the opposite direction. "Now!" Barry whispered when the dam watcher had passed, and they ran on swiftly and in a few minutes came to a dam. They lifted the gates, pounded off the big iron handles, threw these into the river and departed.

There was no need to go back downstream to see what had happened. They had been on too many drives not to understand that a head of water behind those logs would pile them from bank to bank on the gravel bar, form a jam that would delay the Stark crew for several days.

"Let's hunt something else," Ben chuckled, and they went on upriver.

TWO miles farther they came to the Starks' first camp, deserted now. It held no interest for them but as they crossed the open space between the big log buildings and the river a fast team drawing a buggy dashed into view. It was too late to seek shelter. They were caught. Ben grinned. Barry Page stiffened. "Young Stark," he whispered harshly.

The light harness team was jerked to a halt beside them. Norman Stark looked down from the buggy seat. There was no greeting.

Black River Ben had never seen Stark and now he stared with frank curiosity. The young lumberman made no concessions to the pine woods. He wore city clothing. His face was smoothly shaven.

"Pretty boy," Ben commented with what seemed genuine admiration. "Eyes are kind o' wicked but the rest of him scales very well."

Barry Page and young Stark were glaring at each other and neither appeared to have heard.

"Point is," Ben continued unabashed, "if we take him over to the East Fork and keep him until the drive's done, we'd make a lot o' trouble for ourselves. We'd have to get in a Chinaman to wash his collars and shirts, and a barber to curl

his mustache, and it would take at least three flunkies to wait on him mealtimes, pourin' his champagne and carving his goose liver and lighting his cigars. And I'll bet he wears nightshirts when he goes to bed."

"Shut up!" Stark snarled. "And you keep away from the West Fork, Page, and keep your men away."

"That's not sociable," Ben grinned. "We treat your lads nice when they come over to poison horses or spike down a sluice gate. We didn't put a one of 'em in jail."

He was edging away, toward the horses' heads. To Black River Ben, meeting Stark in this lonely place was a heaven-sent opportunity. With Stark a prisoner, they could take their drive through without fear of trouble from the outside.

But Stark saw. He loosened the reins and yelled, and the team dashed on, to be brought to a halt fifty yards beyond. Barry ran after him.

"All I want is ten minutes with you on the ground," he called.

"I'd be glad to accommodate you, if you were alone," Stark answered. "I can whip you, Page, but I won't fight two of you."

"Ben won't take a hand. I'll send him away."

Barry was pleading, and Stark only sneered. "Yes, and how far? He'd be back before I'd knocked you down. And let me tell you, Page. If I ever catch you alone, you'll never be anxious to fight again."

He turned, spoke to his team, and dashed away up the tote road. There were tears in Barry's eyes when Ben joined him, and Ben understood. A man who gets so mad he cries is the sort that never knows when he's whipped.

"That was just his excuse," Ben said. "He'd gang you, so he thinks we'd do the same. But it's a long trail that ain't got a twist in it. You'll catch him alone yet."

There was nothing more to do on the West Fork, with Stark aware of their

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presence there, and they returned through the woods to the eastern branch of the Red Deer.

"It's funny," Ben chuckled. "A feller like him, pink cheeks and hair all smoothed down so nice, thinkin' he can fight. He's big, all right, quite a bit bigger'n you, but—" Ben broke off and laughed outright. "When I think o' what you did to me in Barney's place that first time I saw you! All I want is to be there when it happens."

Two days later Ben got a jolt. He was talking to one of the rivermen who was watching the West Fork and had come in to report.

"Saw as pretty a fight as I care to," the man said. "Young Stark came upriver, all dressed up like he was going to a dance. I'd crawled up close to their drive camp, thinkin' maybe I'd get to hear something. There was a big river pig eatin' his lunch. He'd just got his time. When Stark stops he says. 'Here, my man, take this team.'

"'What a pretty boy!' the jack says. 'Ain't he sweet?" and he went on eatin'.

"Well, sir, Stark knocks the plate out o' his hand, slaps his face and then jumps back. The river pig gets busy then, but he just don't seem able to find this Stark. I couldn't figure it out myself at first. Stark was duckin' and hoppin' around, and every once in a while he'd let fly. Twice that jack went down. His face began to bleed, and he got groggy, and then Stark set his two feet and swung.

"Boys, oh boys! Stark didn't even wait to see what happened. He turned away, told a flunkey to take his team—and, would you believe it, he wasn't even mussed up!"

"Of course, Stark is a big man," Ben said.

"Big! That didn't have anything to do with it. I never saw any man use his fists like he did. No barroom stuff. That fellow's been takin' lessons from a prize-fighter, and it wouldn't surprise me but it was Bob Fitzsimmons hisself!"

Ben's eyes gleamed. "How do you think Stark would make out with Barry?" he asked.

"I was wonderin'."

THE drive went on. The Reed logs were sluiced through the first dam five days behind schedule. The scouts reported that Stark was doing fairly well, considering his crew. No effort had been made to break the jam Barry and Ben had caused. They would leave that until they reached it. The dam had been closed, but not until much water had been wasted.

After sluicing through the first dam Jack Reed's men continued to work extra hours in an effort to make up for lost time. It was a long stretch to Number Two dam, with several shoals and rapids in which jams formed despite their efforts. But these were attacked so savagely there was not much delay.

They did demand the constant attention of Jack and Barry, however. Twice Barry's scouts reported opportunities to retard the Stark drive, and each time he was too busy to leave.

The farther downstream they went, the more strenuous became the work. Rollways were being broken out constantly, adding to the stream's burden, to the likelihood of jams, to the effort required. Simply as a bit of log driving, the work of Jack Reed's crew was remarkable.

Jack himself became obsessed with the task. His long experience and uncanny skill were employed to the utmost, and his men, wise to each move in the game, strove the harder that their labor might be worthy of such direction. To Barry was left the task of guarding against any interference by Norman Stark.

Barry expected this at Number Two dam, where old Jimmy Madigan, one of the most loyal and reliable of the Reed men, was watcher. Long before, he had given Jimmy an assistant that guard might be maintained night and day, and as nothing happened, as no attack of any sort came from the West Fork, he increased this force to four.

The drive jammed and rolled and tumbled and dragged its way south. Already logs were gathering in the backwater, where Number Two dam had transformed marshy ground into a large shallow lake. It would be one of the crucial points in the drive, for logs might strand in the

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lake when sluicing began and the level dropped.

Jimmy Madigan knew this and he guarded the dam as though it were a gold mine. Ordinarily, a dam watcher's duties are simple. He merely raises and lowers the gates when ordered to do so. Now, if Stark should attempt to open the gates, or destroy them, Jack Reed's drive would hang.

Jimmy Madigan prowled about all night, leaving the others to watch during daylight. They laughed at his precautions. "Stark will have to send an army," they said.

And Stark did, just at dawn one morning when the backwater was half filled with logs. A dozen men appeared suddenly from the thick brush, rushed to the dam watcher's shanty and imprisoned the three men sleeping within.

Jimmy Madigan, while it was still dark, had found a low place in the new dam where the water was beginning to trickle over. This was on the opposite side, hidden from the shanty by thick brush, and he was working there with a shovel when the attack was made. The task finished, he started back. A shout put him on his guard and he crept up behind some bushes.

There was no doubt as to what the Stark men were doing. The familiar yellow sticks, the long black fuse, digging with a spade on the lower side of the dam beside the sluiceway—Number Two dam was about to be dynamited. And when Number Two dam went, Jack Reed was ruined.

Jimmy lay there and cursed. He had worked for Jack through twenty seasons in the woods and on the rivers. In all the world, he had no friend like Jack Reed. And now it was one man against a dozen.

The charge was fixed. All the men except one walked quickly away. The one who remained glanced about, then knelt and struck a match. The next moment he was running swiftly toward the hillside beyond, at the heels of his companions and of the Reed men who had been imprisoned in the shanty.

Jimmy Madigan leaped from the brush and started forward as swiftly as his old legs could carry him. The man who had lighted the fuse saw him and yelled, but Jimmy came on, out along the earthen dam, across the planks over the sluiceway, hurling himself down upon the thin ribbon of smoke that rose from the fuse. His gnarled old hands were reaching for it when the dynamite exploded.

Chapter IX

"Grab your peavies, boys!"

BARRY PAGE was five miles upriver when Number Two dam was blown out, and he knew at once what had happened. He sent a messenger upstream with orders that no more rollways were to be broken out and then started down the river trail.

A hundred men were ahead of him, for they, too, knew what that explosion meant, and while they ran heavily along the twisting path in their steel-shod shoes, they talked of its results.

"Jack's been thinkin' he could win by straight drivin'," an old Miramichi logger panted. "Now look!"

"You got to backfire when the woods are burning," another said.

"Nor nobody ever yet tamed a skunk by sayin' 'nice pussy!'"

And it was their drive. From the beginning their pride had equalled that of Jack Reed himself. When those men reached the dam it was with no idea of trying to save the day. That, as they saw it, had been lost. Now they could only gather the entire crew, march through the woods to the West Fork and vent their wrath on the Starks.

"This drive is hung but we ain't through. We'll see that nary a Stark log gets down to the Red Deer."

It was a grim lot of lumberjacks that finally reached the dam. The three men who had been imprisoned in the shanty told a curt story, and exhibited a mangled

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arm, all they had been able to find of Jimmy Madigan.

That silenced the Reed lumberjacks, and their silence became more terrible than their threats. They stood about, dully watching the torrent that roared through the place where the sluice gates had been, waiting for the rest of the crew to come. There was no planning. None stood out as a leader. Those men needed neither scheme nor director.

Jack Reed appeared, his horses foam-flecked and alather, and from the top of the bank he looked down at the scene. After a moment he came striding down, and learned about Jimmy Madigan.

For a long time he stood staring at the gruesome remnant of the old lumberjack.

"All right," he said at last. "We go to the West Fork."

No one commented. They fell in behind Jack and climbed the bank, started swiftly through the woods.

Barry Page appeared as the last of them entered the brush. He was running, and he yelled for them to stop, but none gave heed. They had gone a quarter of a mile before Barry, panting heavily, jumped in front of Jack Reed.

"Where you going with this crew?" he demanded. "I need 'em."

"Need 'em? What for?"

"To get your drive through, of course."

"If you think you can plug that hole in the dam, you're crazy," Jack retorted. "And with the water gone our drive's hung. Besides there's Jimmy Madigan."

"Yeah and how did it happen to Jimmy? Because he was trying to save your drive. You going to let what he did go for nothing?"

"What you gettin' at?" a river pig demanded harshly.

"Put in a new dam below." Barry said. "We can have it done by night."

Some of the men laughed. "Come on!" others shouted. "We got a job on the West Fork."

"Wait a minute!" Jack Reed roared. "You mean the rapids, Barry?"

"Sure! Dynamite'll do the trick."

"I'm a damn fool!" Jack growled. "Back to the river, the lot o' you. Stark can wait, but I'm promisin' you a crack at him and his outfit."

Barry issued orders. "There's a tote team coming down the road. Six o' you take it down to Camp Two and bring back the powder and all the shovels and picks you can find. Steve, take Jack's team and go up to Camp Three and get all the powder that's there. George, go up the river trail and bring every man down to the dam. And when that tote team gets back, tell the driver to go on back to the drivin' camp and bring the bull cooks down with the lunch. And next week won't do."

NO ONE had much faith in Barry's plan. Even Jack Reed began to doubt if it would work, but he reserved decision until they came out on the river a couple of hundred yards below the dam, and around a bend.

Here the stream, a torrent now with the big head of water released, rushed between almost perpendicular banks where it cut through a ridge. Jack and Barry had argued over the placing of Number Two Dam the previous summer, Jack being in favor of putting it below. Now they stood looking at the two sides from upstream.

"It's worth tryin'," Jack said at last.

"It'll work!" Barry retorted. "I'll put fifty men across the river and have 'em roll in all those big boulders. On this side the bank's most straight, and it's clay. If we can get enough powder behind it, we can tip it over, and there's your dam."

"And when we come to sluicin', we blow off the top and let the logs run," a river-man added excitedly.

"We're losin' a lot of water talkin' about it," Jack said.

Yet it was a long chance. Jack, estimating the size of the channel and the amount of earth that could be loosened, saw that they might do little more than block the rapids temporarily, and as soon as his driving team returned he sent a man off with orders to bring in all the horses at the farm and the scrapers which had been used in building the dams.

Meanwhile, fifty men had crossed the river in the shallows below and, with peavies and long poles, were rolling in huge boulders from the opposite hillsides. Others

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dug frantically, in relays, to sink holes twenty feet back from the edge of the gorge. The dynamite arrived. The tote team came with the lunch. More men drifted downriver and were set to work. Axes and saws were brought from Camp Two and from both sides trees toppled into the cut where the rapids rushed. Some were washed out. Others caught to form a framework.

All day the crew worked without pausing for rest. The dynamite was packed in place, the fuses fixed. At sunset Jack Reed gave the word and the matches were struck.

Two hundred men waited breathlessly through what seemed an interminable period. Suddenly one of the sides of the cut bulged out and toppled down into the river.

Still they waited. Water splashed high, and tore furiously at the barrier. A great wave washed up and over, and men groaned. And then the muddy surface receded, gradually became quiet. The dam had held.

"All right," Jack said quietly. "We'll build that up a bit when the teams come. Back to camp, lads. We start drivin' again at daybreak."

In their relief from what had appeared to be certain disaster, Jack Reed's rivermen plunged into the drive the next morning with the ferocity which, twenty-four hours earlier, had demanded expression in an attack on the Stark forces. Victory was what they demanded, and victory meant first getting their logs past the forks. That had been the wager. There was always time to settle other scores. The two crews must come together on the Red Deer. The bet would be decided then, and vengeance would be sweeter when exacted after superiority had been proven.

What the Reed men desired was an opportunity to meet the Chicago thugs. That defeat had rankled through the winter. The unwritten rules had been broken, not only by the use of brass knuckles and blackjacks in the darkness on River Street, but by the importation of hired hoodlums to win a logging town battle. Those city plug-uglies, long since safe in the alleys off Halstead Street, were the real object of the river pigs' hatred.

The Stark lumberjacks did not count except as they represented the Starks themselves. All winter they had come and gone, thinking only of a month's wages and a spree in town. It was doubtful if a dozen of those who had gone into the woods in the fall were now working on the Stark drive.

ROLLWAYS were broken out by the Reed men to be carried away by the current. The great lake above Number Two dam filled with logs. The rear brought down the last of them. A score of men had been busy for days with augers and boom chains, herding logs off the deadly shoals of the marsh with mile-long booms.

Calked shoes trod as lightly as a ballet dancer's on huge white pine timbers. Long, white pikepoles gleamed in May sunshine as they darted from wizard hands to Norway logs. Miramichi and State o' Mainer toiled side by side with men from Saginaw and the Chippewa, from Michigan and Wisconsin.

At the rollways their peavies handled huge timbers with the certainty and ease of a woodchopper piling cordwood. On the swift stream they stood immobile while their bark steeds reared and plunged in the rapids, or danced with astonishing grace and sureness of foot across a bobbing floor of timbers.

And every movement of foot or hand meant a log was aided in its course downriver. Bends where the timbers would be likely to swing out and nudge the bank with a diabolical intent to catch and block their fellows were watched by savage eyes and pounced upon with feline agility and speed. The rear of the drive swept down, peavies clanking against logs stranded by falling water, deft wrists rolling them again into the current. All the drive was gathered at last above Number Two dam.

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Sluicing began at once. Shovels removed the top of the temporary dam in the cut where the rapids had flowed and the big head of water soon cut its way through. There was volume enough to provide a swift, straight flow; and, as there were no gates, the sluicing went on through the night, great fires tended by the bull cooks lighting the gorge. Logs shot through with terrific speed. Only occasionally did one catch and threaten trouble, and always enough men were at hand to prevent the formation of a jam that would have stopped the drive with a tangle of logs in that narrow gut.

It was a critical spot there, and Jack Reed watched it every moment of the sluicing. There was something magnificent about it, taking this last, desperate chance after all hope had seemed lost, and when the final logs darted through, weary bodies relaxed and savage eyes glared in triumph.

"Stop us?" men muttered. "Stark and all hell can't stop us!"

Without rest they went on, for swift river water laughs at human exhaustion. There were still ten miles of nasty river before Number One dam was reached. After that, with the Forks only a mile beyond, lay victory.

Barry Page had taken no chances of trouble at the lower dam. Thirty of his best fighters, all that could be spared from the drive, stood guard there. The need of retaining water was crucial. Below the dam was a place known as "The Chutes," a steep-walled stretch of river impossible to drive without a heavy current to carry the logs above the rocks of the rapids and past an islet that stood almost in midstream.

If Stark intended to block the Reed drive, the lower dam was the place. If it were dynamited before the drive reached it, nothing could save Jack. Barry himself took charge of the guard, sleeping a few hours in the daytime, prowling ceaselessly at night.

BUT the opposition made no hostile move. Scouts brought news daily of the progress of the Stark drive, and it was slowly dropping behind. The Stark men worked long hours but without the savage eagerness of the Reed forces. Jams formed constantly. The walking boss knew his business but he worked with dead material.

Norman Stark was still on the job, Barry learned, still driving up and down the tote road in his buggy, still refusing to make any concession to the woods in his dress. His men laughed at him, behind his back. A boiled shirt would never win their loyalty.

Barry himself made a trip to the West Fork. He could not believe that Stark would refrain from attacking Number One dam. As Jack's men brought the drive southward with swift ferocity, the outcome could no longer be in doubt. They were sure to win unless Stark struck again.

But Barry and his scouts could not discover any indication that such a thing was contemplated. To all outward appearances, Norman Stark was busy getting his own drive down, and yet Barry knew that could not be true. The two branches of the Red Deer River were only three miles apart now, and each day Barry walked across to the West Fork to spy from behind the brush.

Meanwhile, Jack Reed was bringing down the rear of the drive to Number One dam. The first logs had already reached it, were stretching far back in the dead water. Each night the men were told the news from the West Fork, and each night they knew they were farther ahead of the Starks.

And yet those men, as did Barry Page, felt that a crisis approached. Norman Stark had not quit. There was too much at stake. All day as they toiled on the logs, the rivermen expected at any moment to hear the dull boom of an explosion at the crucial dam.

Nothing happened. The rear of the Reed drive came down. Late one afternoon the last log reached the back water. Two hundred drivers stumbled into camp at dark. They were silent. The terrific toil of the past weeks had produced results. In the morning they would start to sluice, and a few minutes later the first Reed log would reach the forks. In two days the last would have passed it and the bet would be won.

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The Starks had not reached their last dam, and there was still the jam below it, caused by Barry and Black River Ben, to be broken out.

But Jack Reed's men were silent in that moment of approaching victory. Something was going to happen. It must.

Barry Page increased the guard at the dam to fifty men that night. The camp was a quarter of a mile upriver, in a large clearing beside the stream. If Barry could foil any Stark move during the night, the wager was as good as won.

The night passed. Logs lay packed above the dam, acres of them. Silent figures patrolled ceaselessly in the black darkness. There was no sound, no rustle of brush, no glimpse of a slinking figure. Black River Ben stood beside Barry when daylight came.

"And there was no need to worry?" he said. "The most Stark could do would be to blow out the dam, and that couldn't stop us a minute now. We'd just sluice through the gap."

"The logs will drive themselves from here," Barry agreed. "But why did Stark pass up any sort of chance? I don't understand that."

"He's passed it up, though," Ben chuckled. "This drive is as good as in. Let's go eat."

As they turned away the brush on the opposite side of the river was shoved aside as though by a mighty hand and a crowd of men burst into view. They came on swiftly, six abreast out onto the earthen dam.

"The Chicago gang!" Ben Black yelled. "Grab your peavies, boys!"

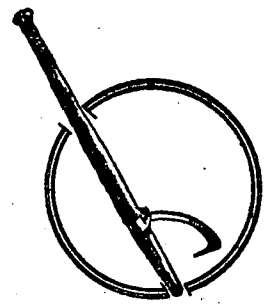
CHAPTER X

CHECKMATE!

JACK REED'S men were called early that morning and they were eating breakfast in the first gray light of dawn when Ben's shout of warning reached them. And they heard his words, "The Chicago gang!"

Many took to the logs, running straight toward the dam, others to the trail around the bank. They yelped as they ran, and each man carried a peavy or a pike pole.

But they were a quarter of a mile away,



and there were only fifty Reed lumberjacks to oppose the solid column of Stark thugs that marched out along the dam toward the sluice gates. The fifty held for a time, thrusting and flaying with their peavies. They saw brass knuckles and blackjacks and whooped with delight. What could such things count against a peavy in the hands of men who could handle them as a trap drummer fingers his sticks?

There were only fifty against two hundred, however, and the two hundred split and threatened to envelope the defenders. There was a retreat, a slow, stubborn recession to the sluiceway, back across it. Then, on the wider earthen dam, the Stark men deployed and by sheer weight forced the others back.

Jack Reed's men saw their comrades coming and gave ground more quickly. Back on the open level beyond the dam there would be more room to swing their weapons, and there the two forces came together.

The Stark lumberjacks fought but without enthusiasm. They kept behind the Chicago gang where possible, let it bear the brunt of the counter-attack. And the hoodlums, cocksure and remembering their victory of the fall, gladly leaped to the charge.

They were organized. They fought shoulder to shoulder whenever opportunity offered, three or more combined against a single riverman. They swung their blackjacks with deadly effect when a victim's head came within range, and they kept driving on, a column of savage, pitiless force.

At last the full crew of Reed men reached the scene. Recklessly and without plan or cooperation, they threw themselves into the struggle. Many discarded their peavies because they could be satisfied only when a bare fist crashed into a surly face.

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A wild, fierce, primitive desire possessed them.

The Chicagoans were singled out but there were not enough to go around and surplus rage was vented on the Stark lumberjacks. These were powerless against an avenging spirit and began to retreat along the dam.

The hoodlums maintained their close formation and suddenly the Reed men surrounded them on three sides. Behind were the closely packed logs.

Shrill yells burst from the rivermen's throats when they realized the situation.

"Let's break out this rollway!" someone laughed.

They charged with leveled peavies. It was like a Roman legion presenting an unbroken front of spears. The Chicagoans gave ground, were crowded over the low bank and down to the water, out onto the logs.

At once they recognized their helplessness. Smooth soles could not grip the logs. There was no skill to maintain a balance. Arms began to wave frantically. What seemed to be a solid floor of heavy timber spun beneath their feet. In a moment half of them were in the water, the other half trying, usually in vain, to maintain a position astraddle a log.

The Reed log drivers laughed. Few sights are more ludicrous than a greenhorn in his first experience with a floating sawlog. And in that laugh the sporting instinct of the lumberjack found its way to the surface.

"Drop those blackjacks and knucks and we'll let you come ashore!" a Miramichi logger yelled.

"Sure! and we'll drop our peavies!" another cried.

"Use your fists, you scum, and we'll give you a chance," others shouted. "Even Stephen, too! Man to man!"

The Chicagoans made no response. Pike poles were thrust out to catch a log cunningly, start it spinning to douse a thug.

"Come ashore and fight or we drown you!" the rivermen yelled.

They enforced their demand, darting out onto the logs and herding the hoodlums to the bank. Pike poles cracked on heads wherever knuckles or blackjacks showed. The Chicagoans climbed out at last, dripping and weaponless.

Jack's men retreated before them. They wanted no ignoble victory. A fair fight, battling a single opponent until one dropped, or could no longer rise, a chance to prove their superiority—they asked for nothing else.

THE Chicagoans could not believe that. They suspected a trick, but once they were on the bank they had no choice in the matter. Jack's men charged, each eager for an opponent, and in an instant fifty rough and tumble battles were on. Those who failed to reach a foe drew back to watch and to cheer.

The hoodlums fought wickedly. Many of them held their own for a time. Two or three proved themselves better men. But their waists were thick. They did not have nine months of toil behind them. They had trained on whisky. One by one they began to drop, while the onlookers cheered.

Then sudden rout came. Men scuttled away to the woods or back along the dam. The Reed men, yipping joyously, gave chase.

Over there, across the river, the Stark lumberjacks had gathered. A remnant of the Chicagoans sought safety beyond the sluiceway, Jack's crew in pursuit.

A man leaped up from the lower side of the dam and waved both arms over his head.

"Dynamite!" he yelled. "Dynamite! Go back!"

He turned and ran. Jack Reed's crew halted.

"It's a trick!" one shouted. "Let's get 'em!"

They surged forward again, and another man scrambled up the bank and darted away. There was something about the manner of his running that brought conviction. A trace of blue smoke arose and instantly the Reed crew was in flight. The last of them were showered by dirt and small stones as dam and sluiceways lifted to disintegrate in the air.

When the sound had died and the Reed men returned to the great gap through which the river was now rushing, they could only wonder why the dam had been

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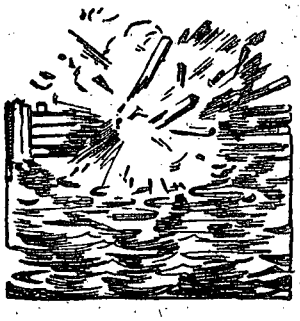
blown out. The act had simply divided the two crews. It prevented an avenging pursuit. Jack pushed through the crowd and surveyed the scene.



"Now what'd they do that for?" he demanded. "We can sluice through here about as well as if we lifted the gates. Cut that boom and in two days our last log will be past the forks."

"They was 'fraid we'd chase 'em back to the West Fork," a State o' Mainer chuckled.

Barry Page came up and added his perplexity to that of the others. He and Jack discussed the situation for a while.

"Might as well begin sluicin'." Jack said. "They can't do any more to us."

"But what they hangin' around for?" Barry asked. "If there was any way of getting ashore from the logs, we'd go over and drive 'em out."

Jack looked upstream. Only a single boomstick reached out from the bank, across which men would have to go in single file.

"No chance," he said. "Let's get to work." He looked around at his crew and grinned, but in that moment of victory he missed one face. "Where's Black River Ben?" he asked.

Ben was not there. No one could recall having seen him after the fight started. He had been one of the guards at the dam, the last to retreat across the sluiceway.

A shout was heard, even above the roar of the torrent that rushed through the gap, and they turned to see a man running toward them from downriver.

"There's Ben," Barry said excitedly. "What's up now?"

He and Jack jumped down the bank, the crew at their heels.

"Quick!" Ben panted as he stopped before them. "Young Stark's down on that little island with a case o' powder and he's going to blow that big rock into 'The Chutes.' If he does, where's your drive?"

Jack and Barry stared at him an instant, then started on a run down stream, the whole crew following.

"The Chutes" were less than a quarter of a mile below and hidden by a slight bend. Even as they ran, Jack and Barry understood the situation, for they were familiar with the place. If Norman Stark succeeded, the Reed case was hopeless. But they did not speak as they ran through the brush.

STARK was not in sight when they arrived on the edge of the gorge through which the East Fork flowed. The river, only a trickle a few minutes before, was now a roaring torrent. The island split the current, but the main body of water passed on the east side through "The Chutes." It was a clear, straight drop, offering little trouble, for logs would follow the heavier flow.

Hanging over the chutes, however, a huge rock and a great mass of earth forming the greater part of the islet now threatened to block the main channel and convert the even flow into a mad chaos of eddies and boiling cross currents in which logs would up-end and dart athwart stream. With sluiceways gone above, there could be no breaking out such a tangle of timber.

That the rock and earth, if blown out, would block the stream was easily apparent. Norman Stark climbed out from behind the rock, looked up at Jack and his men and waved mockingly. And the hand that waved held a familiar stick of dynamite.

Jack Reed cursed. One glance told him how hopeless was this new situation. No human could cross the raging stream between the west bank and the islet. There might be a chance from the other side, but already the Stark crew was gathering on the high bank there. Norman Stark could leisurely continue the task of placing the charge, then light the fuse and easily swim with the current to the west bank. There was no way to reach him, no way to stop him. Jack and his men could only watch.

"How'd you come to find him down here?" Jack asked Ben.

"'Cause the other—that business at the

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dam—didn't look sensible to me," was the answer. "It was only a fight, and a fight wasn't gettin' Stark anything, while our boys would 'a' forked over their winter's wages for a crack at that Chicago gang."

"That was all a blind to give 'em a chance to blow out the dam," Jack interrupted.

"Sure, but why blow out the dam? That wouldn't do us any harm. It was what I couldn't figure. And then I thought of 'The Chutes' and how a heavy current would fix it so we couldn't get to the island. So I took a run down here to see if I wasn't right."

"You were right," Jack agreed harshly. "But what good's it do us? With a bateau now, we might come downstream and land on the island."

No one commented on that. The two bateaus were upriver, beyond the tightly packed logs, and even the whole crew could not get them below the dam in less than an hour.

Men looked at the boiling, ripping current, but lumberjacks are like sailors. Few knew how to swim, and none could battle with that boiling current.

And all the time Stark was at work digging out a hole in which to place the dynamite. They could not see him from where they stood. Upstream they got an occasional glimpse. A few rivermen tried throwing stones but the big overhanging rock offered ample protection.

Someone suggested that the whole crew go far upstream, where they could cross on the logs, and come down on the other side. It found favor, because it meant another battle with the crew on the opposite bank, and from there they could get out to the island.

"No use," Jack Reed growled. "He'll have that rock blown in before you get half around."

A log drifted down the current, gathering speed in the rapids above, rolling and tossing violently, diving partly from sight, and then darting on in the terrible grip of "The Chutes."

Another followed. Both swept close to the island, then past at dazzling speed.

"If a fellow could ride a log in that water . . ." Black River Ben suggested.

"Hell!" Jack snorted. "No man can."

Someone yelled, and Jack glanced upstream. There was a murmur, almost a growl, among the men, then a deathly silence. A third log was coming down into the rapids, and on it was Barry Page.

Chapter XI

SLUGGER VERSUS BOXER

FEET gripping a big white pine, knees slightly bent, hands holding a peavey across his thighs like a balancing pole, Barry was as motionless as a statue. But he portrayed that which no statue can, a sense of power and agility and of an intense alertness.

The log began to bob in the white water. Curling waves swept it from end to end. Still there was no movement of the tense rider of the rapids.

From the two high banks, four hundred men looked down, and forgot to breathe. They knew white water, and the ways of logs therein, and none gave Barry Page an outside chance to cling to his tricky steed as far as the islet.

The log bobbed more swiftly now. Once Barry's feet moved. His body lifted, the log spun, and then his needle-soled shoes gripped it, snubbed it dead.

The log gathered momentum. It swirled. An eddy turned it with a jerk. Again that quiet little hop, and again the calks caught and held.

Then came a sudden, terrific heave. The log reared, lunged, spun. It was like a mad thing now, diving, twisting darting. No wild horse ever sunfished and bucked so furiously, and no cowpuncher ever rode such a horse standing in the saddle or without at least the chance to "grab leather."

Barry Page could not grip with his knees

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or brace himself in a snug stirrup. He could not count on a certain rhythm that is present in any muscular effort.

Once he was thrown into the air. He whipped over, lit like a cat. Water tore at his knees. A counter current set the log to spinning, and his feet twinkled as never have a tap dancer's. Abruptly they were still. He had snubbed the log, halted its mad whirl.

His body swayed. Knees bent, straightened. Shoulders were hunched forward. His two hands still held the peavey across his thighs.

He was in the very worst of it now, just above the islet. The log became a demon. It weighed a ton, and that river tossed it about like a feather in a breeze. It reared, dived, plunged. As a fish rises to the surface and tries to shake out a hook, that piece of white pine left the water in a wild leap, twisted, struck with a splash that hid it and its rider. The next moment the swift, straight pull of "The Chutes" caught it, and the log shot forward, spinning terrifically.

But Barry was still aboard, and again his feet twinkled. Again there was that little hop, that throwing of his weight into a snub that arrested the turning motion. His knees bent. His body shot up and out. The peavey contributed the force of its inertia before it fell into the stream. Barry had leaped as the upper end of the islet flashed past.

At that instant Norman Stark hurried out from behind the rock and down to the lower end of the island. A shout went up from his crew on the bank. He had lit the fuse.

Barry Page's leap did not carry him to the shore. He dropped into the boiling current, and it reached to his thighs, dragged him down. His head bobbed up, he lunged from the bottom, and a hand gripped a brush.

"The fuse!" Jack Reed bellowed. "Get away, lad! He's lit it!"

The words reached Barry through the tumult of tumbling water. He dragged himself to the bank, rose to his feet and darted away. Jack and his men saw him disappear behind the rock, and again they ceased to breathe.

The shouting had halted Norman Stark. He, too, had heard Jack Reed's warning, and he turned to look.

Barry appeared then, a spluttering black rope in his right hand. He hurled it in Stark's face and lunged after it.

THERE was a smooth, open space, perhaps twenty feet square, at the lower end of the island, and in the center of this two men met. Barry charging heedlessly, arms flaying, Stark standing coolly ready, clenched fists lifted.

Stark sidestepped. His right shot out, and Barry went headlong to the ground. He bounced up, charged back, and again he went down.

"Good God!" Jack Reed gasped. "And Barry can whip all hell!"

There was less rubber in Barry's spring to his feet, but he bored in again, his arms two pistons, his heavy thighs adding their force to his blows.

This time he connected, a right to the ribs that staggered Stark. Barry kept after him remorselessly, but Stark skipped lightly away, while his left flashed out and drew blood from Barry's face.

They settled down to fight then, Barry pitiless, unshakable, Stark cool and boxing like a master. Back and forth across the level space, now on the brink of the stream, now surging to the other side, the battle raged, while four hundred men stood silent and cramped.

Barry Page should have been beaten quickly. For all his instinctive timing and judgment of distance, he was no match for Stark's skill. His face was cut and covered with blood. The steam went out of his punches, the spring from his legs. He kept charging in, but only to permit those stinging lefts to reach his head, those shattering rights to thump against his ribs.

Stark did not escape damage, but there never was a moment when he was not master of the situation. Again and again Barry went down, and each time he arose more slowly. Always Stark stood over him, ready with a crushing punch.

The lumberjacks lining the high banks were no longer silent. The very ferocity of the struggle infected them and the mad, savage roar of the mob greeted the furious

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moments when the battlers stood toe to toe and slugged.

Barry held his own there, and perhaps a little more, but always Stark slipped from a definite conclusion and danced away, while his lightning fists cut and blinded.

Once, after a desperate exchange, he stepped in instead of away and a right cross sent Barry reeling. Barry went down, half over the bank, slipped in. The swift current gripped his legs. Only his hands, clinging to the grass, kept him from being wrenched loose.

A groan went up from the Reed men, and at once it became a savage snarl. Stark ran forward, kicked and stomped at the clutching fingers. They loosened, and Barry was swept away.

Panting, exhausted, worn by fifteen minutes of furious fighting, Stark turned instinctively to finish the task which had brought him to the island. The current had sucked Barry Page under. That part of it was ended.

But Barry's head bobbed up, whirled along the bank. A hand reached out. A foot caught the rocky bottom and a friendly eddy whirled his battered body in beneath the island. For a moment he clung there, then got slowly to his feet and waded ashore.

A warning shout came from Stark's men. Stark had a new fuse in his hands and now he dropped it and came charging back. The spring was gone from his legs, however. Barry met him, wavering, groping, peering from between puffed lids, and again they stood toe to toe and slugged.

Stark forgot his science. He was no longer cool. Long ago this man should have gone down to stay down. But Barry Page had not been riding a tote road in a buggy. For nine months he had been using his legs. For three weeks he had been charging up and down the river trail. There was no fat about his waist, and there was no fear in his heart.

Back and forth they went, slugging with weary arms, thrusting with trembling legs, until suddenly Stark wilted. A left to the ribs doubled him over. A swift uppercut that carried the last of Barry's strength reached his jaw.

Stark went down, and he did not get up.

Barry stood over him, wavering, groggy, and then he remembered what he had come for. He weaved uncertainly away, went down into the hole behind the rock which Stark had dug, and a moment later yellow sticks of dynamite arched upward, to fall with a splash into the swift current.

"All right, lads," Jack Reed said in a husky voice. "Upstream! Start those logs to movin'. We've got a drive to take through."

A WEEK later the Reed drive was in. The crew thronged River Street. Men rolled out of saloon doors and into the street, fists flaying, legs twining. Little Izzy Aaronson stood in the door of his uncle's clothing store, eyes popping, limbs atremble.

Suddenly a column of men appeared in view, calked shoes kicking up the dust, heads thrown back, throats bellowing a driving song.

"Oh, I went up the Eau Clair to drive,
I thought they'd never begin;
The wind was blowing dead ahead,
AND Kelly was drunk again."

Izzy darted to the sidewalk racks of clothing and began gathering suits in frantic arms. A white-bearded old man appeared at the door.

"That's right, my boy!" Old Moses cried. "Be quick about it. Jack Reed's men have come to town. Such a times! Such a times! Such hooligans! Like a feller says, 'Hell's let out for noon.' "

More Hell! ***Coming Soon!***

Another Great Logging Story by

"The Hellbenders" ROBERT E. PINKERTON

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Hardboiled, That Marshal of the Toughest Town in the West—but Somewhere There Was a Soft Spot in His Heart

ERNEST HAYCOX

celebrated author of Western stories

gives us

another yarn of "Pistol Gap"

BULLY MCGRANE

IN PISTOL GAP life was pitched to a key of suddenness and intensity. Men of this Western land worked with an energy that brought out the salt sweat; and their hours of play were equally violent. If they drank at all it was usually to excess and if they gambled they flung the whole of their labored wealth on the green table in prodigal abandon, never considering tomorrow. And in Pistol Gap death only infrequently visited a man in bed; one moment he was alive and in full stride; the next moment he was quite utterly dead. In such case the coroner's jury had a uniform, unvarying verdict: "dead by an act of God."

It was therefore natural that when Tud Drury rode into Pistol Gap leading a pack animal during the latter part of a sultry afternoon that Bully McGrane, marshal, should ease his massive bulk forward on a hotel porch chair and watch the newcomer's successive movements with a sort of lowering, belligerent interest. Tud had made a trip down to procure supplies for himself and his three partners only two days previously. This trip augured something else; and the loaded burro also indicated something else. So Bully McGrane watched, removing his hat to scratch a cropped head badly scarred from his prize-ring days.

Drury went into the stable, remained a while and emerged with a canvas sack hanging heavily from one arm; Drury returned on the far side of the street, and entered. 'Lisha Funston's bank. Bully McGrane's broad jaws tightened against

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his cigar and he tugged at the ends of his downsweeping mustache which gave him considerable physical resemblance to John L. Sullivan—with whom he once had sparred. A rumble came out of his chest; he laced his fingers across a vast paunch, at the same time keeping a direct glance on the bank door. Presently Drury came out empty-handed and started back. McGrane's throaty challenge sounded forth with a bluntness that was at once uncivil and insolent. Drury paused in apparent unwillingness.

"Come 'ere, Drury. Want to see you."

Drury approached, visibly irritated. He was a young man, dark featured, straight-spined. About him was the suggestion of a will yet to be curbed; and though he wore the rig of a miner—stained with shaft mud—he seemed to belong to another species of Westerner, he seemed still to carry the air of belonging to the saddle by trade. Coming to a stand in front of the marshal, he reached for his cigarettes and stared back at McGrane. If McGrane's manner was one of overbearing authority, Drury's was no less hostile.

"In early, ain't you, Tud?"

Drury only shrugged his shoulders and poured tobacco into the creased wheat paper.

"You got grub for them bushjumpin' pardners of yores just a while ago. What's the play now?"

Drury's white teeth flashed on the drawstring of the tobacco pouch; his eyes crossed the marshal's face, mirroring irony.

"Looks to me," went on McGrane, "as if that pack brute was carryin' yore forty years' gatherin' out of the hills. Must've been a quarrel among thieves. You quittin'?"

Drury lit a match to his cigarette. "Maybe," he observed, "I ought to get a permit from you to be alive, McGrane. You sure seem to expect it. My business is my business. I don't owe you anything and I'm mindin' my affairs strictly. As to what I've been doin', or intend to do—you go straight to hell." Turning definitely on his heels, he walked away, crossed the street again and enterd the Freighter's Rest.

McGrane, who was capable of springing out of his chair and crushing Drury with one lionlike sweep of his fist, relaxed, chuckling. It was not the mellow, humorous amusement of a man giving vent to inner kindliness. McGrane was too much of a cynical materialist to be kindly. Rather, his chuckle came of a malicious satisfaction in knowing Drury hated him with a full heart. McGrane took savage pleasure in making others hate him, in making others writhe under his hard dominance and at last desperately and futilely strike back. Pistol Gap was a tough town. Down this canyon-walled street came the turbulent characters of the hills—the miners, the punchers, the teamsters, the soldiers, the gamblers and gunmen and outcasts. Down this street walked the combings of the frontier, splitting the town wide open in their revelries and battles. There never had been a sheriff competent to go out and bring back a man; the other officials of Pistol Gap were but shadowy figures in the background. This was McGrane's town. He ruled it with his gun and his fist; he ruled it because he understood the wholesome effect of fear. Bully McGrane had only one thread of philosophy in his bruiser's head; might made right. And so while they cursed him, he sat back as some giant mastiff and jeered them with an arrogant, contemptuous indifference.

Meanwhile McGrane's pale-blue eyes were fastened on the Freighter's Rest, turning over in his mind the meaning of Tud Drury's return. And he knew that if the man let any significant information drop along the street, willing ears would pick it up and bring it to him. The cigar in his mouth sent up intermittent rings of smoke; his two broken-knuckled fists lay idle on the chair arms. Pistol Gap was held in sultry silence, broken only by the ringing strokes of Billy Monteith's blacksmith hammer.

HOWEVER, Tud Drury was no hand to betray his private affairs. In the Freighter's Rest he tarried only long enough to redeem certain pledged articles in the saloon safe. There was a poker game in progress and one of the players indicated an empty chair. But Drury shook

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his head, bought a cigar out of courtesy to the house, and left. Turning west, he walked the length of the street and swung into a kind of alley leading up a lesser canyon. Here was the seamy side of Pistol Gap; along a meandering creek fronted small cabins, farther up was Chinatown, and in the immediate foreground rested the three-story bulk of a building cut into the ravine wall. Across the peeling paint was a semicircular sign:

PRIDE OF THE HILLS
GENTEEL ENTERTAINMENT

Drury walked through the main door and into an enormous rink that served as theater and dance hall. It was dark and stifling and permeated with the stale odors of tobacco smoke and spilled liquor. Along one side ran a bar; at the far end stood a stage; opposite the bar and enclosed by plush curtains were a series of private stalls. Here and there lounged a few heat-oppressed employees of the place. Drury looked around for a moment, went on down a side corridor and climbed two flights of stairs. At a door near the end of a long hall he knocked quietly; it opened and a tall girl with ash-gold hair and eyes so set in gravity as to seem never-smiling stood before him.

At sight of the man her face lightened and an inner worry seemed to dissolve. As for Tud Drury, he threw his cigar to the floor in sudden distaste; he spoke with a slow huskiness that was nothing like his clear and level challenge to Bully McGrane.

"Here I am, Anna."

She motioned him inside the room—a bare, clean room with a single shaft of sunlight cutting across the curtained darkness. Against this light her tall body made a round and graceful pattern.

"I heard you were in town a few days ago, Tud," said she, a drawling weariness in the words.

"I was," said the man. "But I was busy and went right out. Well, it wasn't that, either. But I was figuring out a proposition and I didn't want to say anything to you about it until I could come and be sure of good news."

"I thought," murmured the girl, "you had changed your mind. Forgotten."

Drury flung up his head. "Not in a thousand years! Anna, we're through with all our troubles. I've swung my deal. I got out of that mine with money enough to see us clear of this crooked country and far enough away never to think of it again. I despise everything in it. It's crucified you and branded me. But it won't any more. We're going—we've got a fresh deal ahead of us."

"Tud—you made your money straight? Not like you once did, not by stealing?"

Drury straightened. His talk quickened and took on a ring of assurance and strength. "Since the night I saw you six months ago, Anna, I have never touched a drop of liquor, I have never ridden with the old gang, I have never roped another man's cow. Every penny in my pocket came out of the earth. It's mine—I worked for it. I'm not sayin' I liked grubbin' in the dirt. I don't, for it's not my game. But I did it—and the sooner we're married and on our way the better. Down in the Thunder Cloud country there's some Indian land open to homestead. There's where we'll go."

She turned a little to better study his face. "Your partners—you've had trouble with them. I can see it, Tud."

"They were crooked when they bought into my claim. They're crooked now. I know what they figured. They aimed to work until we had a stake and then knock me in the head. There's been no night in the last four months I've had both eyes shut. Never a time I didn't keep my gun on me. They figured it was a sure deal. I knew they figured it that way. But I needed money to develop the claim and I took 'em in. They paid for their shares and they agreed to the split—five parts of all dust for me and one apiece for each of them. I reckon they had me counted as an easy mark until this mornin'. The mine's peterin' out and I couldn't stand the strain any longer. So I forced the issue. Had to hold a rifle on 'em while we divided up. I didn't take an ounce that wasn't rightfully mine, but they wanted to kill me. They went into it with their eyes open and aiming to cut my throat—and I guess they'd have done it in another couple days.

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But I'm clear. We can start fresh—and we'll forget Pistol Gap ever existed."

"If you still want me," whispered the girl.

"No matter how many times I change my mind," said the man, "nothin' could ever make it change about you."

"Tud—if it is only pity that brings you back I won't listen."

"Here," muttered Drury, "don't say that. I won't stand for it. What was I when I walked into this place six months ago and saw you singing on the stage? A no-good drifter. On the down-grade. Shiftless. Takin' what didn't belong to me. And that would have been my story until a bullet stopped me, if I hadn't seen you. Do you reckon pity had anything to do with the change in me? You know better."

"You could pick a better girl, Tud."

He was silent for a time, but his dark eyes flamed with inner fire. "Not in a thousand years," he went on. "When I consider the battle you had to eat and keep alive I want to go out and kill somebody. It'd broke any other girl in the land. It ain't right you've got to sing and smile for the animals that come thunderin' here every night. Damn a country that lets things like that happen. But it's over with now and you'll walk out of here as fine a woman as when you came in."

"If I were to tell you——"

"As fine a woman as when you came in," repeated Tud Drury very slowly and distinctly.

Her long calm broke. He crossed the room and took her gently. A sharp breath sheered the hot and shaded silence. "Tud, you're a—a fine gentleman! I'll see to it you never will be sorry! Never!"

"You're gettin' the worst of this bargain," muttered Drury. "But it's sure good to hear you say that. Get your things together. It's going on five o'clock now. I'll step up the street and buy a rig and team. At six I'll be back. We'll walk to the court house, be married, eat our dinner—and ride away. It's a long trip tonight and you're goin' to be tired. But I'd rather cash my chips than sleep in Pistol Gap again."

They studied each other for a moment, tremendously sober, tremendously stirred. Then the man bowed with a queer, half-formal politeness and turned from the room, going down the worn stairs and through the dismal gloom of the dance hall. In the street he looked all around the surrounding hills with the fire of rebellion in his dark eyes; and he squared his shoulders as if a steadying weight had suddenly settled upon them.

"The angels," he muttered, "ain't all in heaven, nor the sinners all in hell."

TUD DRURY left the smaller side gulch and entered Pistol Gap's main street. Halfway along it and opposite the Freighter's Rest was the stable. Crossing the rutted, dusty thoroughfare, he passed Billy Monteith's blacksmith shop and paused a brief moment to catch sight of Monteith standing over the anvil. The man was stripped to the waist, his black hair curled damply across a white forehead and all the great flat muscles of his torso rippled to the rhythmic hammer strokes. White metal flakes shot out, the hot iron crackled in the cooling tub and Monteith walked to the water pail. When he tipped his head to the dipper twin ropes of sinew came to a point on his neck and his blue, frank eyes fell on Tud Drury. The dipper dropped and Monteith drawled a friendly phrase.

"Back for a spell, Tud?"

Some of Drury's resentment died. He nodded agreeably. "Not for long, Billy. I'm shakin' this town's dust off my feet."

"For you," observed Billy Monteith, "it might not be a bad idea. The Gap eats up too many good men."

Drury inclined his head in silent agreement and continued toward the stable. He was on the point of turning in when he looked on down the street to locate Bully McGrane, and by that move he discovered three riders advancing along the canyon trail. They were too far removed to be absolutely identified, yet Drury seemed to take root there in the last of the day's sunshine and across his dark face flashed an

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emotion that was compounded of anger and fear and almost despair. He looked around the street, like an animal seeking exit from a trap; he scanned the alleys, the yawning doors and the canyon running off from the Pride of the Hills. Quite slowly passiveness took the place of those other fitful expressions and, drawing himself up in the manner of one electing to play out a bad hand to the bitter end, he aimed for the Freighter's Rest and passed inside. The poker game still continued and the empty seat was still waiting for him. He slid into it, turned to better face the door, and signaled for a stack of chips.

He was thus occupied, both hands in plain view on the table top, when the three newcomers entered, saw him—and stopped.

One was a whippet of a man, another nondescript of feature, the third burly and formidable. But whatever physical variance existed between them the same luster of sullen purpose was stamped in their eyes and the same sour, lawless slant of jaw appeared beneath the stubbled whiskers. Thin-lipped, predatory and vindictive men and of a breed common enough in the fastness of the hills. The weight of their presence brought the poker game to a full halt and roused the somnolent loiterers in the saloon. The burly one slowly raised a hand and stretched it toward Tud Drury.

"You—come outside a minute. We want to talk this over."

Drury's answer was soft and self-contained. "I've got nothing to say to you fellows. The deal's done, the record's closed. I'm busy."

"It ain't done by a dam' sight," grunted the big man. "You think it is—but it ain't. Don't figger for a minute yo're goin' to get away with this."

"With what?" countered Drury. "You rigged me for a sucker, played me for a killin'. Now that you fell down on your pirate business you're squawkin' like a bunch of tinhorns."

"Nev'less," said the big man with a cold determination that weighed oppressively over the saloon, "you ain't done with us. Nobody's done with us that uses a gun to draw out."

"I beat you to the gun business," taunted Drury. "You'd of done it in another twenty-four hours. It hurts to go honest for a change, don't it? I've got nothing to say to you buzzards. I kept my part of the bargain and I'm through. The claim is yours. My share's mine. I'm lucky to be alive."

"Come outside," repeated the big one.

"Not in a thousand years," said Drury and smiled coldly at them. "Next time pick a softer sucker for the kill. I knew your earmarks the minute you eased in on me."

"Won't come, uh?" questioned the big one. His teeth snapped together; dark blood surged along the weather-blackened skin. "Have it yore way. But you're done. Mark this well. Yuh won't ever leave Pistol Gap alive. You're not through with us."

They filed from the saloon. Silence remained after them and the last of the day's sun slid away from the blurred windows, throwing deeper shadows across the long room. Tud Drury stared at the cards and never stirred until one of the players called him back from his somber thoughts.

The three men tramped down the street and crossed it, to come before Bully McGrane who still sat on the hotel porch. McGrane's vast body was motionless and his great arms trailed idly. He said nothing but the chill of the unwinking eyes fell on them and remained there. He waited, as he usually waited, knowing well enough how the very power of his presence both confused and enraged others. Yet the three stared back grimly; and it was the big man who broke the spell.

"McGrane, there's a play comin' up and we're warnin' yuh now to keep out of it. It's our business and none of yours. Make no attempt to interfere."

"Bold boys," rumbled McGrane ironically.

"Put it any way yuh choose," stated the big man evenly, "but keep out of it. We're after a man and we mean to get him. It won't be the first time such a thing's happened in Pistol Gap and it ain't the last. Stand aside and don't interfere."

"I reckon the four thieves fell out, uh?" grunted McGrane.

They waited stolidly, untouched by his sarcasm. McGrane shifted in the chair, cigar smoke wreathing around his scarred, red-veined face. So sure of himself was he

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that their challenge evoked a throaty chuckle; strange light flickered in his pale eyes. "Not tryin' to bluff me, boys?"

"This is no bluff," said the big man without emotion. "It ain't yore business. It's ours. We mean to get Drury. He won't leave Pistol Gap. We'll see he don't. We're declarin' ourselves now and here. What about it?"

"I never could get sympathetic about a crook," rumbled McGrane. "One more or less don't mean much to me."

"Glad to hear you say it. That's the way we want it."

"Maybe," said McGrane, "you heard what I said. Maybe you only thought you heard what I said. I never commit myself to a crook, or three crooks."

"Let it ride," replied the big man bluntly. "And stay clear of this. Marshals don't last forever." And the three wheeled abreast and strode toward the stable.

DUSK'S brief interlude came to Pistol Gap and, even as it came, began to fade into dark. Lights sprang up and a stream of cool air came filling into the stifling gulch. Men strolled to supper, the town awoke and moved more briskly. At the end of the street the Pride of the Hills suddenly was a-gush with yellow beams. McGrane chewed his cigar to the frayed end and tossed it away. The down-curving lines of his massive face began to appear; he closed a fist like a man finding pleasure in pure strength, and rose. Shouldering through the increasing crowd, he turned in at the now dark blacksmith shop. Billy Monteith sat by the door, smoking an evening pipe.

It was a strange thing that McGrane, whose nature instantly bridled at the thought of any strength equal to or superior to his own, should like Monteith above any other man in the country. The youthful, mild-mannered blacksmith was everything McGrane was not. He trusted people and was trusted by them; he despised the very physical force he represented in so great a degree; and on one occasion he had stood up to McGrane and whipped the marshal—the only individual in all that wild country who ever had met the bruising, mauling ex-prizefighter on his own ground and came out uncrushed. Yet perhaps McGrane's liking was not strange.

For if he ruled by fear and violence it was also true he respected a man who refused to quail before him. So he found himself a fresh cigar and spoke idly.

"What'd Drury have to say to you, Billy?"

"He's leavin' the country," drawled Monteith.

McGrane grunted. "He thinks he is. He'll never make it. He's trapped. Notice them three tough nuts that just came in? They're layin' for him. They'll get him."

Monteith sat up and clucked his tongue. "Now that's bad. You ought to stop it, McGrane. I sort of like Drury. He's played pretty straight recently."

"Straight?" boomed McGrane. "Teamed up with them three? Don't think it. Once a crook always a crook. I knowed the time when he was wanted by six different sheriffs. They don't change. That mild manner don't fool me none whatsoever. They been robbin' sluiceboxes. There's my guess. Now they've fell out. Drury probably got away with the dust and they're after him. Crooks always fall out. They'll get him."

"Still think you're wrong," mused Monteith.

"Soft!" snorted McGrane, contemptuous of any kind of sympathy. Then he chuckled. "They warned me to stay out of it. Me! Jack McGrane! Imagine that. High, wide an' handsome, that's their style." And the chuckle dissolved to a growl.

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"Well, what do you figure?" the blacksmith asked.

"Show 'em who runs this town, Billy. They're all four crooks. I'll stay clear, all right. They can have Drury. He's no good and never was. But when they get him I'll get them. I'll have 'em for murder—and there's the end of four more tough nuts."

Monteith smoked in silence for a long spell, then spoke regretfully. "Seems to me you're forcin' the hand of Providence some. It ain't right."

"Forcin' nothin'," retorted McGrane, enjoying his plan hugely. "I'm standin' aside. Lettin' nature take its due course. Might's right and dog eat dog. There ain't nothin' pretty about a gunslinger or a rustler or a sluicebox robber. They'll get what they got comin' to 'em."

"I think Drury's straight," repeated Monteith, knocking out his pipe. "I think it because he's got a girl down at the Pride of the Hills."

"Anna—a dance hall girl."

"Anna—a good dance hall girl," amended Monteith softly.

"There never was a good dance hall girl," snorted McGrane.

"Considerin' a multitude of circumstances and necessities," was Monteith's grave answer, "I sometimes think there never were many bad ones. Anyhow, I like Anna and I like Tud. They've got a stretch of good luck comin' to 'em for a change. If Drury's pullin' stakes, that means she's going with him. McGrane, you ought to stop those buzzards."

"They made their bed and they'll lay in it—stiff and cold," said McGrane.

The big marshal swung away, moving with a rapidity unlooked for in a man of his bulk. At a dark alley mouth he paused and considered the street. Presently he saw the three men come from the stable and break in differing directions. One posted himself in front of the Freighter's Rest, one stepped back into the outer darkness, the third walked toward the Pride of the Hills. McGrane weighed this tactical shifting with a critical eye, waiting with grim patience and grim enjoyment. Perhaps ten minutes later the man by the Freighter's Rest seemed to abruptly discover something or receive some covert message; turning, he hurried off for the Pride of the Hills. McGrane's big head nodded.

"They got wind he wouldn't pull out unless he took the girl." And his scorn for Drury deepened. "The dam' fool! It's his skin he's riskin' for the kind of a woman he could buy anywhere dirt cheap. They've got him hipped. He won't never make it. Now I'll take a hand." Leaving the alley mouth, he repassed the blacksmith shop and headed for the dance hall. Monteith, he observed, had gone.

TUD DRURY still sat at the poker table, but the game had broken up and his hands idly stacked and divided the chips before him. It was six-thirty. His hour of appointment with Anna had come and gone, his plans were smashed by the ruthless three waiting in the street with a cold, patient stolidness that seemed like the inevitable signal of death. The saloon was filling, other tables occupied. Yet the word was out and he was let alone. Men watched him in catlike attention and all this while he sat with his head slightly bowed, his dark cheeks passive, unmoved.

But under the cover of that outward indifference his thought raced along in futile swiftness, running down one blind alley and another, striking barriers at every turn, and collecting again with ever mounting desperation. There was no hope for him on Pistol Gap's main street, no possible chance of reaching his horse. Perhaps he might slip quietly through the rear of the saloon and leave town afoot, perhaps he might reach timber if he elected to try his solitary fortune. Yet in so doing he abandoned Anna, and when he abandoned her he also threw over whatever of hope and self-respect there was left in him.

At a gesture Tud Drury swept the chips from the table and rose. The rumble of talk in the saloon sagged as he walked to the bar, took his drink, and seemed to collect himself. There was a glinting anger in his eyes and all his features tightened down—the expression of one staking everything on the turn of a card. Then, without warning, he strode to the back door of the saloon, placed his hand on the knob and paused. A chair scraped, accenting the

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stillness that gripped every soul in the place. Drury squared his shoulders, stared behind him and spoke bitterly.

"If this town's waitin' to watch me die—see how I do it. Damn Pistol Gap and all that it means!"

With that, he ripped the door open and lunged into darkness, falling on all fours. Crouched there he awaited the bullet. But it never came. No prowling sound disturbed the back lots, no lurking body moved across the thin lanes of light winking down from the residences high placed on the canyon wall. Judgment still was suspended, still ominously withdrawn and waiting. Drury cursed with a rising rage. But even as he cursed he felt the first flare of hope in the long dragging hours of the afternoon. Getting on his feet, he ran beside the back building line, cut across the gap existing between the main street and the smaller gulch of Chinatown, and halted again. Over the creek lay the Pride of the Hills, filled with sound of music and men; the tide of traffic streamed into it and the voice of the announcer at the door rose stridently.

"They know," he muttered. "They know I'll come there. And that's where they'll be. No use to avoid it now. Can't stay in the dark much longer, can't sidestep a showdown."

A Chinaman trudged along the creek, leading a belled burro. Drury skirted a pair of cabins and approached the trail at a dark angle. The Chinaman came abreast, saw the figure of the man dimly in front of him, and halted defensively.

"Sen Yat?" said Drury.

"Ah," said the Chinaman and peered closer. "Dluly. Long time no see."

"I'm no hand to beg," muttered Drury. "But I did you a favor one time, and I need help now."

"You say, Dluly."

"I need two horses placed back of the dance hall, Sen Yat. Away up on the slope. I need 'em now. Right where the trail cuts down from old Number Two below Discovery. You do that?"

"Can do, Dluly."

"Don't go to the stable for horses. Use your own. Here's a hundred dollars. Let nobody see you."

The Chinaman took the money and plodded deeper into Chinatown. Drury watched him wind through the maze of shacks and disappear. He held his position as the lagging, dreary minutes went by, never letting his eyes stray from the upper end of the gulch. In his mind he reconstructed every step of the Chinaman's way—getting the horses, saddling up, leading them around the throat of the gulch, laboriously climbing the steep slopes. All these acts he allotted a space of time, throttling his uneasy impatience. Half a dozen miners tramped by at arm's length and curved into a chop suey joint. A youthful Oriental slipped forward as if he were balancing a basket on his head. Drury stepped farther into the dark shelter, but the Chinaman swerved and came against him. A soft phrase passed between. "You go now." And then the Chinaman padded on.

Drury took a deep breath and left his shelter. He crossed the creek without recourse to the bridge lower down. He climbed the bank and, still using the shadows, arrived at the corner of the dance hall. Another step meant coming into the full light and mixing into the eddying crowd. Nowhere did he see his three ex-partners. That they were nearby he never doubted; they had laid their trap with skill, leaving no footprints to show.

"I've done my last dodgin'," he murmured to himself. "I may die, and God help the girl if I do. But here's jump-off for Tud Drury." On the heels of the thought he walked into the light and was carried through the door to the dance hall.

Once inside, Drury stepped out of the milling current of men, back to the wall; and his first glance went forward to the stage, thinking that Anna might have gone on with her part of the evening's entertainment to cover the breech of time. But she was not there, nor anywhere along the smoke crowded vastness of the room. A hundred faces shifted before his eyes, none of them of importance to him. So he slid casually through a side door and started up the stairs; in one cautious backward glance he caught sight of Bully McGrane's features fixed on him, cynically amused; and it seemed to Drury that the marshal was waiting for the inevitable burst of

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shots. It brought him to a pause. He studied the dim inner hall sharply, ran his hand across the butt of his gun. Chill touched his nerves. Shaking it off, he ascended the two flights and went toward the girl's room. The door was ajar and through the opening he saw her waiting.

DRURY scarcely had cleared the dance hall when Bully McGrane stepped out of a corner and crossed the same inner door. Framed there, he turned to consider the crowd. The three gunmen had been in sight until a few minutes back and he knew they had seen Drury. Subsequently they had departed, not by the front but by a stage exit. McGrane considered this a sure indication as to the scene of the kill. Yet he was curiously inclined and he wondered if Drury's next move would be in accordance with the arrangements. Being a shrewd, weatherwise man he knew that in life's everlasting rabbit chase the pursued occasionally tricked the pursuer. Whatever the case, he meant to be on hand; for to him it was a grim jest, another piece of sport to feed his blunt and frankly brutal nature. So he went up the stairs, treading near the banister to check the squeaking of the boards. On the second landing he heard the murmur of voices and he went down on his toes until he stood near enough to make out the rapid play of talk. The girl's voice rose clearly.

"You never should have come here. What does it matter? Go ahead—any way to get away from them. I'll come later. In a few days."

"And let 'em take their spite out on you?" came a deeper, male voice. "Not in a thousand years. That's what they'd do. They're a pack of savages."

"They'll kill you, Tud!"

Drury's answer was small and indistinct. McGrane shifted, a scowl coming over his face. Then the girl broke in.

"I won't go! You've got to do it without me! Oh, Tud, I will not drag you down like that. What does it matter about me? But if they kill you, then I have nothing left."

"I'm through dodgin'," said the man. "And I ain't leavin' you behind. I've got to stand up like any man would who's worth his salt. I been through enough torment thinkin' of you here. We'll stick together from now on, and if I can't take care of you, then I reckon I ain't worth botherin' about. Get your grip. There's a small back door at the foot of the stairs...."

McGrane retreated quietly and descended the first flight. There he halted, scowling massively into the dingy shadows as if displeased at what he had overheard; as if this man and this girl had refused to play the part assigned them. Drury was a crook, Anna a dance hall girl. They had made their bed, now let them lie in it. All people in this world were the same. Every man struggled for himself, every man looked to the main chance and pushed the other fellow over the cliff in the showdown. There was mighty little difference between the best and the worst and every last soul crawled before the gods of fear and greed and appetite. What right had either of those two people to act as if they were any different?

He heard them coming and he crept on down the next flight of stairs. There was a single lamp bracketed to the side of the hall. He dimmed the wick and hurried on to the back door, opening it and stepping swiftly aside. A gust of cold air scoured through and the night wind rattled the brush all along the gulch. Some woman was singing from the main room and the tramp of feet shook the structure, but out yonder a kind of bated stillness held the shadows. McGrane's sharp eyes raked the cloaked foreground; very softly he lifted his gun; and the next moment he had closed the door behind him and was flat on his stomach, ten yards away. No sooner was he settled than the door opened again, letting out Drury and the girl. He saw their bodies sway aside from the opening and he heard Drury's soft murmur of reassurance run into her suppressed sigh. Suddenly they broke into a run, and passed him.

The soft echo of their steps came back in a straight line and he knew then what they meant to do. Over the summit lay old

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Discovery and from there it was a clear road out to the high desert, out to a different land. Probably Drury had managed to picket horses along the gulch and probably he thought himself safe. But McGrane, growling softly and strangely irritated, understood very well how few were the moments stretching between that delusion and gunplay. Somewhere in this tricky blackness the three crooks were waiting.

ALL sound, all echoes died off. A palpitating stillness flowed down the slope. McGrane rose to his knees, big fist tightening about his gun. "Once a crook always a crook," he rumbled. Anger rose vastly in him, the old desire to sweep out with his massive fists and destroy took hold. He got to his feet, big body swaying forward as if his very will sought to tear away the impenetrable blanket of that night. A faint murmur of rattling brush came to him. Distinctly a voice said, "You're done for." McGrane let out a roar and charged onward up the incline.

A bullet's flat smash broke across the gulch, the echo rolling wider. The girl screamed and hard on that sound a pair of explosions rocketed together. McGrane saw the muzzle flashes; he heard Anna crying, "Tud—Tud!" And, placing those two, he opened up on the point he had seen the more remote mushrooming of powder light, still beating inward, still booming his rage into the mystery of the night. The outline of a pair of horses lay across the path, Tud's gun answered from another angle. Then there was no more firing. The brush crackled beneath a threshing body and Bully McGrane, blowing like an engine, halted in his tracks.

"Who's that?" challenged Drury. "By the good God, if you've touched this girl——!"

"Tud—I'm all right."

"Who's that?" repeated Drury.

"Shut up," grumbled McGrane. "Them yore horses?"

"Yes."

"Well, get on 'em and go. Yuh deserve to be hung but there ain't no reason I should see you do it. Get on 'em and go."

Drury's voice jerked out a halting phrase.

"McGrane—I'm in no shape to pay my obligation to you. But——"

"Damn the obligations. Get on them horses and go! You know what I think about you."

The girl's arm touched his great shoulder. McGrane stiffened. Her lips brushed his cheeks and he felt a tear fall on his rigid hand. "After all the hurt and cruelty of Pistol Gap," said she, "you leave us this kindness. Somewhere there is a guiding star for us—and for you."

"Be good," said McGrane in the ancient farewell and stood quite still as he heard them mount and climb the trail. The hoofbeats diminished and died. McGrane stirred himself, shook his burly shoulders and walked off the trail. The figure of a man lay there and the marshal touched him with the toe of a boot. "Now where," he rumbled, "is the others?"

An unexpected voice cut in. "Right at my feet," said Billy Monteith. "Knocked cold with an ax handle. I figured you'd come."

"Damned sure of yourself, ain't you?" muttered McGrane.

"I liked Tud and I liked Anna," was Monteith's quiet reply. "They had good luck comin'."

"I dunno," growled McGrane. "But there's one crook less, anyhow. The best of folks in this world are none too good and the worst of 'em ain't always so bad. Not that it makes any difference. Sentiment don't get you anywhere, Monteith. Might's right and tonight proves it. Bring those two tough nuts to the jug and we'll let 'em cool off while that pair of young fools gets a good start from the country."

He turned down the slope, swinging his arms—morose and fuming and ready to vent the loose ends of his temper on whoever crossed his path; for Bully McGrane hated to have his grim philosophy of life disturbed and in that philosophy there was no place for a man like Tud nor a girl like Anna. So he kicked open the dance hall door and stamped down the hall. Music and revelry came unabated from the Pride of the Hills and the sound of firing had brought no curiosity seekers to the slope. In Pistol Gap life ran to suddenness and intensity.

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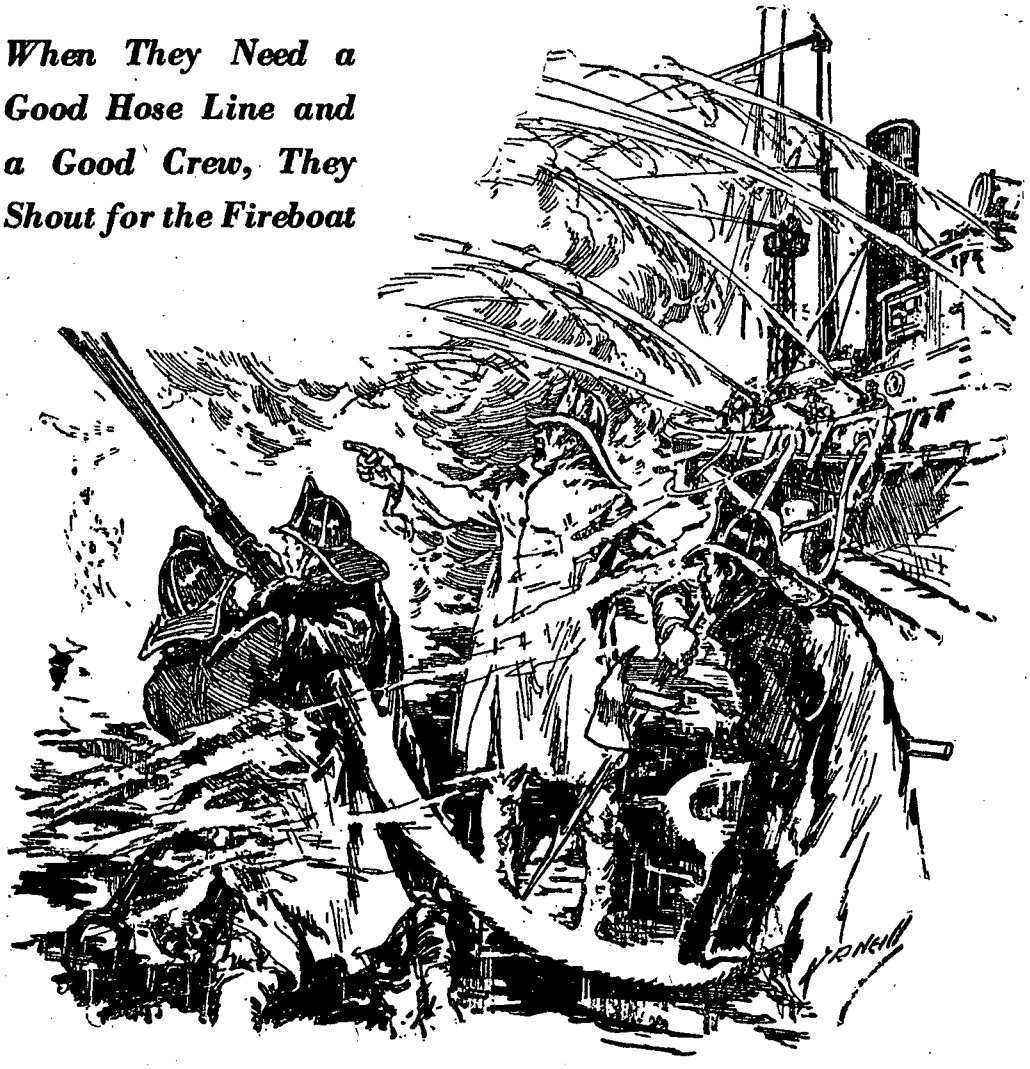
When They Need a Good Hose Line and a Good Crew, They Shout for the Fireboat



BOATLINE

Another Crackling Fire Story

By KARL W. DETZER

FIREMEN hate a boatline. Remember that first of all. Any boatline. Hate it, fear it, try to avoid it. Its great black bulk, thick and tough as an elephant's leg, throbbing with the power of a fireboat's pumps, is too heavy for mere men to lift, its pressure is too tricky for men to trust. Without decent warning, it will yank free from its tripod and from the hands that grip it, and writhing like a snake gone mad, will strike fiercely left and right with its hard brass snout. Death—as well as mud—lurks in the boatline, and up and down the fire department you hear few good words for it.

Except from Captain Patrick Sullivan—"Mud Scow" Sullivan of the fireboat *Geyser*—who will praise it outrageously in that rich round Irish brogue of his. Who will argue the inarguable. Who will offer to fight anyone who lifts his tongue against

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it. And likely as not tell you the story of Captain Jim Kehoe of Engine 281.

They had been recruits together, had Sullivan and Kehoe, a dozen years before. Friends, after a fashion. And because his father was a seafaring man, Pat Sullivan asked assignment to the fireboat service, when his probationary period was ended, while Kehoe went to a distant land company in the suburbs. They met seldom after that—once a year, perhaps, at fifth alarm fires which brought apparatus shrieking from all sections of the city. Even then they could speak only briefly. A man's voice must be loud indeed to make itself heard for long above the roar of twenty-five pumping engines.

But a year ago, after serving on the Harlem River and along the Brooklyn shore, Sullivan was assigned to command the *Geyser,* down on North River near Twenty-Third Street. And the same shift brought Kehoe to Engine Company 281, over in Tenth Avenue.

They both were captains by that time, tall, lean, wide shouldered battlers, their ears alert for the sound of the alarm bell, their eyes on the upper rungs of the promotional ladder. Kehoe's new district was one that would bear close watching. Packing plants with their ammonia tanks and the constant menace of explosions, lumber yards with great piles of dry timber stored under flimsy roofs, drafty freight sheds, dirty lofts, crowded traffic, narrow alleys—it was a district to try the nerve of any man at any time, but particularly since the new order went out, holding each company commander responsible for hazards, for safety and for loss in his own first alarm territory.

Certainly a man might go up the ladder rapidly, if he made good in this Tenth Avenue district. And Kehoe intended to. But what chance, he argued later, with such bad neighbors? For there, just beyond on the river, moored beside company quarters at the end of a municipal pier, the fireboat *Geyser* lifted and sank with the tide.

IT WAS an afternoon in June when the alarm which was the start of the argument battered in across the wires. Captain Pat Sullivan was tramping down the pilothouse ladder after inspecting a paint job at the base of the pilothouse pipe, when he heard the voice of the bell in the watch room.

Seven—eight—nine.

That was a riverside station, he remembered, one of his own first alarm boxes, and he leaped the last three steps to the deck, just as a second bell, which bulged out of the smoky wall of the quarters like a wart on the face of the building, commenced its racket. He heard the wheeze of the speaking tube in the pilothouse and the tap of the telegraph indicator.

Jeffries, his chief engineer, popped his big head out of the engine room hatch at once, sniffed at the oily summer air, and popped back again. The pilot slapped open the wheelhouse door.

"Where at?" he shouted.

Dugan answered; Senior Pipeman Dugan, who charged like a wild horse out of the door of the quarters, clawing into his slicker and spitting tobacco lavishly as he ran.

"Eleventh and Twenty-Ninth!" he cried. "Twenty-Ninth Street and the dockside!"

The rest of the crew tumbled aboard: O'Reilly, Mitzell, Bjorgerson, Petty, Lyons and Byrne. They cast off the mooring lines as the propeller reversed slowly, slackening the ropes, Sullivan trotted up the stairs. Kurner, the pilot, stood with feet spread before his brass wheel, neck twisted, face drawn into a scowl.

"Let's go!" Sullivan yelled. "Go for a bit o' sail!"

The whistle grunted twice, signal to other vessels that the *Geyser* was emerging from the slip. The propeller thrashed. The bow nodded gently into the small swell. A dirty, black junk boat, loaded with trash no one would want to steal, yet obviously stolen, slid quickly out of the fireboat's way.

The nose of the fireboat turned pugnaciously downstream. The whistle roared once at a ferry which gave it no attention; twice again as it pulled up opposite Twenty-Ninth Street.

The engines grumbled, sending up their heavy vibrations, like a giant shivering. The crew gathered forward around the bow water gun, capable of throwing a

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mighty stream at a fire, looking intently ahead. O'Reilly, who always talked too much, was waving his arms toward the skyline, chattering. It occurred to Sullivan that the reason O'Reilly still worked in ranks was his tongue.

"Posts!" the captain yelled through the open window of the wheelhouse. Immediately the group broke up. "We'll lay a bit o' line," he added.

Mitzell and Bjorgerson already had yanked the canvas tarpaulin from the boatline reel, forward of the pilothouse, between the forecastle and the bow water gun, and had loosened the clamps which held the small iron wheels of the reel on its circular turntable.

"Lay line?" Dugan shouted, and when Sullivan nodded, O'Reilly yelled:

"Lay line, you say, sir?" he scowled at the four-inch rubber dipped fabric. "Before we know where it's at?"

"I've a mind we'll soon find out," the captain answered. "We lay."

Petty and Lyons were trotting across the clean deck, lifting the loops of the hempen mooring lines. Kurner, the pilot, moved the pointer of the telegraph indicator and the throbbing of the engines slowed.

"Where'll I bring her in?" he demanded.

Sullivan squinted again along the waterfront, once raked the skyline with his narrowed eyes.

"I see nawthin'," he confessed. "Get close in, though. Inner end o' the slip. To the right side."

"Sta-board it is, sir," the pilot answered, and shifted his wheel slightly.

Sullivan tramped down the pilothouse ladder at once, circling the forecastle, where the brass tips, nozzles, sprayheads, cellar pipes and claw tools were arranged in orderly rows. His crew, except Petty and Lyons, stood ready at the reel. O'Reilly was talking again.

"She's a heavy job, sir," he complained, "luggin' this damn snake. Maybe the tender will be layin 'a line for us. Maybe we'll not need ours."

Sullivan hitched his shoulders. They were tall shoulders; his lean head, under its leather helmet, thrust up arrogantly above the others as he stood among them.

O'Reilly's complaint stirred no anger in him. A hundred times he had heard it, a hundred times, as commander of the *Geyser*, had done just this same thing—prepared to lay line, prepared to fight fire even though he saw no smoke, and then—just as O'Reilly predicted now—when he got to location had been ordered to stand by.

For a good enough reason anyone except himself would admit. The boatline throws mud as well as water, and officers cautious of loss in their districts call it into action ashore only when a building is doomed.

"But they call it then, damn quick enough," Captain Pat Sullivan said. "Bad blaze, they don't stick up their noses at mud!"

"I'll go take a look-see," he promised now, and turned to old Dugan, who stood back waiting for orders. "Start laying in the dock towards the street, Dugan," he said. "I'll be right back."

THE fireboat scraped the iron sheathing of the pier. Sullivan, standing on the low rail, leaped over. His feet came down with a plop of rubber soles on the concrete. He did not turn his head before he started inland. He ran easily, at a loose trot, saving his wind.

No, he didn't blame O'Reilly for not wanting to lay that line. Dangerous. A mankilling job. Its hard rubber casing made it heavier than three pieces of three-inch hose. Ordinary hose wouldn't last six weeks here on the waterfront with the salt air and the salt spray. It had to be super-quality. Everything had to be super-quality on a fireboat—even the men.

The warehouse through which Sullivan ran was dark and deserted and smelled of broom straw. An oblong of intense white light showed the door at the street end. He ran, blinking, out to the sunshine.

Apparatus cluttered the street opposite

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the pier. A tall, new building of fancy brick, with ridiculous terracotta ornaments around the door, was seeping smoke from its lower floors. Two lines of hose already spurted small fountains at their couplings.

Kehoe's outfit—Engine 281—was wading through smoke that lay in a knee-high cloud on the cobbles. Sullivan halted, eyes searching for a battalion chief. He must report. Couldn't do a thing without orders. And he didn't see a chief. Saw no one except Jim Kehoe. Kehoe, with his men, was dragging a second line into the smoky door. This was Kehoe's district, Sullivan remembered. He would be held responsible.

But still no sign of a chief. After ten seconds Sullivan started to the left, around the corner of the burning building. A series of small shops lined the first floor there, neat little shops with shiny plate glass windows and tile entries at their narrow doors. While the captain of the fireboat ran forward, the white helmet of a battalion chief popped out of one of these doors. A cloud of smoke emerged after him, explosively, as if it had booted him into the street.

The chief was a stranger to Sullivan; one of the new promotions, new to the district, likely as not new to his job. A slim man, with sandy hair. He coughed, as if he were not used to smoke. While Sullivan ran toward him, the other halted twice, turned, started back, then came on uncertainly.

"Report, sir—." Sullivan got no farther.

"Why the hell don't you lay line, then?" the battalion chief snapped at him. "Lay line—in this door—basement job—go find it!"

"Sir, I'm. . . ." There were many things Sullivan needed to say. First, that his was a boat crew, that the heavy black boatline already was being laid, that it would take twice as long to stretch it as to stretch an ordinary hose. But the superior officer gave him no time.

"Don't give a damn who you are—lay your line!"

"Yes, sir." Sullivan charged back toward his boat. He met O'Reilly, halfway through the warehouse, yelling, dragging the first length of the black, heavy hose. Dugan and the rest of the crew staggered after him. They were panting already.

"Sure, it's a mankiller," Sullivan grunted, as he grabbed the brass nozzle and felt the weight of the hose. "Got to hurry though—this way—here."

The battalion chief was not in front of the building when the fireboat captain returned. Gone around the rear, no doubt. It didn't matter. Sullivan had his orders. He was to go in that door, find the fire, throw water. Throw water from the boatline. Throw mud, gravel, slime, sticks, stones—whatever the pumps on the boat churned up from the river bottom.

This fire must be a bad 'un, if that were the case. Even Pat Sullivan admitted that the boatline ashore is the last resort of a harried department. When water is needed, water in quantities, when the fire has such hold that it must be suffocated at no matter what cost in water damage, then is the time for the boatline.

But in spite of Sullivan's pride in his outfit, his willingness to work, faith in boats from his father before him, this didn't look like that kind of fire.

Smoke was pouring from the lower floor, to be sure, out of every door and window, between the cracks in the sidewalk, through cellar gratings. It hung in a gray, dingy cloud about the gutters, so that the converging fire companies waded in it to their knees, like men wading in a low fog.

There must be more fire here than he had guessed, Sullivan decided. Perhaps the basement was roaring with flame. Perhaps the boat line was necessary. But he looked about again for that battalion chief as he led his crew into the door. Still he did not appear.

OTHER companies did, however; second alarm engines arriving from farther distances. Their presence indicated only one thing. A bad fire. And besides, Sullivan had his orders. That chief had told him to lay line and throw water; to lay in through this door and take his pipe to the basement.

"Come on," he bade.

Clerks were carrying account books from the office at the rear of the shop.

"What's down cellar?" Sullivan asked.

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"Stock room," a man answered. "Stationery. Jobber's stock. Lots of paper. Writing paper."

"Where's stairway?"

"To your left."

Sullivan tramped past them and opened a door. Heat kicked up at him, heat and churning smoke. Through it he saw flame rolling along rafters, spilling into the narrow stairwell, chewing the woodwork with a sound like gnawing teeth.

"Open shut-off, half way," he bade. "O'Reilly, tripod—hose sling—strap it here. Stick that tripod in floor—jab, man! Now, Byrne, water. . . ."

He braced his heels, stiffened his hips, caught the tip firmly. Dugan crouched opposite him. O'Reilly, complaining, dropped in behind. Mitzell and Bjorgerson, still panting, felt their way through the smoke and wrapped arms about the butt of the pipe while Petty, on his knees, gripped the tripod. Only Byrne stood back, shielding his eyes with an arm. He was coughing already.

"Here she comes!"

Air rushed out of the inch-and-three-quarter tip. Just below, in answer to it, flame crackled impudently. Smoke churned faster. Heat rolled out of the cellar as it might out of an open oven door. Then the water spurted. Even above the crisp odor of burning wood and charred paper, Sullivan could smell the river. An oily, dirty smell. The stream roared. Once the tripod shifted and they all tensed their muscles. But the three prongs of its feet steadied and the sling stray gripped it tight.

No one spoke. Fire retreated. After five minutes smoke turned gray. Heat rose with less violence. The stream thundered louder. Sullivan bent over the nozzle. He still smelled the river, the mud and the grease and the dirt that churned through the hose tip in a slimy deluge. It was not an unpleasant smell. Too many years he had sniffed it day and night to object to it.

Suddenly, crouched where he was on the stair, he felt a hand on his shoulder, a fist pounding at his rubber jacket. Through the haze of smoke he made out the face of the battalion chief who had ordered him in with his line. The chief's mouth was open, howling, but the roar of the stream drowned his words. He leaned close to Sullivan's ear.

"Shut off!" he pointed to the nozzle. "Shut off, you fool!"

Sullivan shook his head. He dared not shut it off too suddenly. That pressure would rip the hose, jerk the fabric loose from its brass couplings, send its heavy black body into whipping coils. He pressed down slowly.

"Tell Jeffries at the boat!"

Bjorgerson ran. Sullivan pressed down again slowly, until, after a moment he felt the pressure slacken. Bjorgerson had got to the boat, that indicated, had ordered the engineer to reduce the flow.

Sullivan pressed farther on the shut-off. The stream bent. It diminished to a trickle and halted. Smoke still surged out of the stairway, but no fire showed itself. Below, he heard other companies working, the tap of axes, the breaking of doors, sharp orders, and occasionally a splash.

And up with the smoke still floated the oily smell of the river.

THE battalion chief did not speak till Sullivan had backed toward the door, leaving his men with the pipe.

"Your name, Captain?" the chief demanded. His lips twitched.

"Pat Sullivan."

He was interrupted by Jim Kehoe, captain of Engine 281. It was the first time Sullivan had been near enough to exchange words with Kehoe since the two had been assigned here to the west side. The land company officer was roaring.

"You, Sullivan! With a boatline! Why, you damned lousy——"

Sullivan straightened. "Steady," he warned.

"What you doing, dragging a boatline in here?" the chief demanded. "Usually throw water without orders?"

Sullivan drew in his breath. His cheeks puffed out. They were tense and fat as

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hose for a moment, hard with the anger in him.

"No," he said, restraining himself with effort, "no, sir, I don't. But I got the orders. When I reported."

"You reported?"

"Yes, sir, and you was that excited there might of been two of you. You told me to lay line."

"I told you nothing!" the chief shouted. "Unless—" he paused, questioning: "Did you tell me you commanded a boat?"

"No, sir. I didn't get a chance. You was throwing a pretty good stream yourself. If hollering would of put out the fire, there'd be no need for a boatline. You was all a-tremble, sir." The charge bristled, so angry he was. He gave it time to sink in before he added: "As it was, I knocked that ten-cent smudge."

Kehoe interrupted: "Knocked it? Who couldn't knock it with a boatline? I'll not be responsible for the water loss, sir!" he turned indignantly to the chief. "It's up to you and Sullivan—dragging a boatline, throwing filthy water on that stock!"

"You've made a loss, Sullivan," the chief accused. "A water loss a hundred times the fire loss. It's a kid trick, turning river water into that basement. The raggedest ree-cruit would know better. Every piece of stock there is ruined! The big boss'll want to talk to you, Sullivan."

"He'll be asking for your bugles, if I know anything about it," Kehoe broke in. "You ain't even fit to command that mud scow, Sullivan. Comin' into my district with your stinking boatline——"

Sullivan took a heavy step forward.

"Call it that again, Kehoe, and I'll knock you down like a fallin' wall. It's the boatline saved your building."

"Saved it hell!" the chief cried. "Throwin' garbage! You'll report downtown on your off, tomorrow, Captain Sullivan. Let the board settle it!"

Sullivan ordered his crew to break sections and carry their hose rolls to the boat. He said nothing as the lines were cast off and the *Geyser* reversed slowly, backing out of the slip. When Dugan tried to question him, he shook his head once, violently, and no one mentioned the affair again. But his crew had heard Kehoe refer to the *Geyser* as a "mud scow," and Sullivan had earned his nickname.

THE evening papers carried the story of the fire, and those that opposed the administration made a feature of the water loss. Sullivan read the statements glumly. There was no answer to them—except that he had done as he was told. And even then, he realized, had he identified himself, had he insisted on reporting in the proper manner as regulations directed, naming his company, the battalion chief would not have ordered the boatline into service. And the whole crew of the *Geyser* would have been saved, heat, danger, heartbreaking labor, and himself disgrace.

Next morning he was called downtown to the municipal building. The chief of department gave him a chance to explain.

"That johnny-jump-up of a bat chief, sir, told me to lay line," Sullivan began.

The chief of department chewed his cigar and signed three letters before he replied.

"You didn't report properly when you arrived, Sullivan, and you didn't give the chief a chance to know who you were. Think the whole department knows you?"

"No, sir."

"Haven't any more sense than to use a boatline on a fire no worse than that?"

"It knocked the fire out, sir."

The chief groaned.

"Lord, it should, Captain. Ruined eighty thousand dollars' worth of stock, simply by your bullheadedness. Captain Kehoe tells me——"

Sullivan stood up. He was willing to forego even promotion to express his mind. "I don't give a damn what Kehoe says, sir."

"You trying to be impudent, Sullivan?" The chief laid down his cigar.

"No, sir. But when that false alarm goes making remarks about me boatline. . . ."

"You deserved them, Sullivan. Listen to me: You talked too much the other day. Shot off your nozzle like a turret wagon. I'm going to let this affair drop. But I'll be keeping an eye on you, understand that? And I never want to hear of you using that line again unless you're ordered to, plain. You know—at least you ought to know—

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the boatline's used ashore when there's nothing else to do. When the rest have failed."

"Sure, sir. When they need a good line, and a good crew, sir, they holler for the boat."

"Git," the chief admonished. "I'll be filing charges against you for impertinence, next thing I know. Git out."

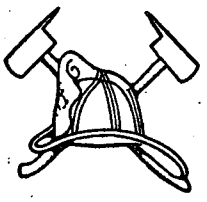
Sullivan obeyed unsteadily. In the corridor he met Kehoe, who had testified first.

"Listen, false alarm," Sullivan began. "Me and you ain't friends any longer. Me and me 'mud scow' are like to bust out and rain all over you. And if ever I hear a word out o' you, Kehoe, that's disparagin' to the boatline, you'd best go pull a fifth alarm for reserves."

ALL summer the argument festered. All summer Pat Sullivan talked to his crew, and to anyone else who would listen, about the colossal advantage of a boatline. Turning logic out of the quarters, he argued violently in favor of it. His men, honest firemen that they were, did not reply, except O'Reilly, who was promptly silenced.

"But it's a danger, sir," O'Reilly had said, and Sullivan swung around on him fiercely.

"Are you a milliner or a schoolmarm, O'Reilly, if I may ask? It's dangerous, you say? So's a fallin' wall, to some extent, and a tumblin' roof, but would you stand acrost the street was you able to get close with a line? Sure, it's dangerous, but think of the work it does!"



"And the damage," O'Reilly began. "Dirty river water, sir——"

Sullivan roared. "Maybe you'd be for puttin' out fire with perfume! It's a fine boatman you make, O'Reilly. Holy water aint a bit wetter than this here river, and it's the wetness puts out fire. You'll take a hitch in your tongue, O'Reilly, from now on."

He saw Kehoe twice at big fires. Both times old, dry, tindery lofts were spitting their dusty insides through windows and roof when the *Geyser* went into roaring action. Dozens of land lines, trained on the fire, were having no effect.

"Steam makers," Sullivan snorted. "Ain't strong enough to get close."

The *Geyser's* lines, feeding into turrets, water towers and cellar pipes, roared unchallenged and the smoke turned gray.

"It's too bad they don't pass a law agin boatlines, Kehoe," Sullivan remarked as he passed the engine captain.

Kehoe scowled, but did not answer at once.

"Substitute a bit o' garden hose, I suppose, and the fire business would be perfect," Sullivan added.

"Don't bother me with your craziness, Sullivan," Kehoe replied over his shoulder. "Time'll come when you'll have the same idee of boat pipes I got. It's your head that's to blame. It's unbalanced."

"Never mind my head," Sullivan flared.

"I don't," Kehoe answered, "not in the least I don't."

An assistant marshal approached. "Shut off the noise, you two," he bade.

"It ain't noise, sir. It's wisdom I'm puttin' out," Sullivan answered. "This Kehoe, he's a false alarm—no, I'm telling you, sir, he's a false alarm and a nuisance and a grief to decent firemen. He'd go putting out fire with the morning dew. I've no liking for him, no more'n I've got for a box o' carbide in a flood."

"Wait," the marshal bade. "You fellows can't pull this!"

Sullivan paused. "I'll promise, sir," he grunted, "promise not to say a word beyond this. Was that man stewin' and fryin' and hollerin' for help, I'd not give him the reach of a pikepole."

"And I wouldn't ask it off you," Kehoe answered.

That was their last meeting—until October third. All the hot summer and fall they went their own way, or when a big fire brought them both with their companies, each pretended the other was not there. But back in quarters, while his men shook their heads, Sullivan talked of the boatline as an overproud father talks of his eldest son.

"Show me anything on wheels," he would say, "anything, I tell you, that can put out water like we do. We're good as

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ten of them thousand-gallon pumpers. Them and their measly little lines!"

ON THE morning of October third—firemen remember the date—Sullivan was particularly quarrelsome.

It was his long shift of duty. He had come on at five o'clock the afternoon of the third, with the regular night crew, and had stayed on through the morning shift. Twice in the night the *Geyser* had hooted its way to waterfront fires, twice Sullivan had waited impatiently in the slip, while battalion chiefs and an assistant marshal decided against using his crew.

And then, at nine o'clock this morning, had come another alarm, and as he plunged into an alley to report, he had blundered through the smoke into Kehoe. The engine captain, turning to his company, had shouted: "Out the way for the Mud Scow."

Sullivan made no answer this time, only hitched his gait and went on. Again he was not needed. That same sandy haired battalion chief was in command. The man was less excited now. The crossed bugles on his cap had taken on their first coat of tarnish, and he showed more ease in command.

Sullivan, listening to him, ordered his line rolled, and went back to his quarters. The morning was warm, an unseasonable fall day, with a dry wind blowing over from the Jersey meadows. The fall rains had not commenced, and the air was filled with fine gray dust, even as it crossed the wide river.

At two o'clock an alarm banged in from a station downstream. Sullivan, tired from his two night alarms that had cost him sleep, was dozing in the shadow of the pilothouse when the big getaway bell set up its lively chatter.

"We roll!" he yelled, and clawed up the pilothouse ladder.

Even while the others piled aboard, he heard the engines reversing, and the throb of the shaft. The mooring lines were cast off. Prompt to the half second, the *Geyser* bobbed into the small harbor swell, and pushed out into the river.

Half a mile away, above a dock which had caused sleepless hours for more than one departmental chief, black smoke was rolling.

"It's the lumber pier!" Pilot Kurner shouted. "Saints, take a look!"

Sullivan nodded grimly. "There'll be hell poppin'," he answered.

"This wind," Kurner added, as he spun his wheel. "This here breeze is notionable. It's like to scatter a fire."

"Then's the time they've little to say agin boatlines," Sullivan said, and after another minute: "Damn that ferry! The man has no sense, that's steerin' her. Run her down, you can, with my permission."

They dodged the ferryboat. While still a quarter of a mile away, they could make out the details of the catastrophe that awaited them. The lumber wharf lay by itself in an angle of the river, a wide spread of concrete and timber, its outer end covered by an iron jacketed shed. Between this shed and the shore a pair of railroad tracks ran through other lumber piles, under flimsy shed roofs.

The length of the pier was some nine hundred feet, so that two ships could unload along each side at once. But its breadth, full three hundred feet at the narrowest point, was unusual. Fire could play havoc here, once it got started, and the guns of the fireboat barely penetrate to the center.

In addition, to make matters worse, the pier was of old wooden piling and crib construction, the girders soaked in creosote and tar, and poured atop them a thin, concrete shell. Once flame got started beneath, it could burn unhampered, with a hundred streams raking the top.

But it was not the pier that blazed today, as Kurner first suspected. Beside the wharf, and drifting toward it, a small disheveled vessel was throwing off clouds of black smoke.

"Tanker," Sullivan muttered.

"Little one," Kurner agreed. "She's burnin' amidships. Been explosion, and she was cut loose."

"She'll bump agin the lumber wharf," Sullivan growled.

"In two minutes. See the oil runnin' down her sides? We'll not get too close. River's on fire all around."

Sullivan, leaning out of the pilothouse

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window, called down to the crew: "Rail pipes, Dugan, port and starboard. Rig four of 'em. O'Reilly, climb the mast—take Black Tom, need mast pipe, quick. Understand? We'll be runnin' into fire. Throw your stream ahead. Keep it off us. And," he hesitated—"off the pier."

"Fine chance, sir," O'Reilly shouted back, "with that wind. It's under the pier now."

Sullivan disregarded him. "Bow pipe, Bjorgerson," he continued, "pilothouse pipe, Petty."

O'Reilly was right, probably, Sullivan admitted to himself. But what to do about it? He could smell the blazing oil when the wind veered. Inland, on Eleventh Avenue, he heard the shriek of sirens as land companies charged past him. He cursed the twelve-knot speed of the *Geyser*. At least Kehoe could get to a fire in a hurry. His little red wagon was good for that.

SMOKE rolled out from under the dock. The tanker, drifting, banged against the end and was pressed there firmly by the wind. Small explosions peppered her decks, throwing burning oil on the iron shed, scattering blazing patches far upon the water. The *Geyser* was five hundred yards from the end of the pier when a greater blast rumbled. Sullivan, straining forward, saw the superstructure of the tanker bend and rip—sway—collapse like paper into the roaring tanks below. Saw the sides bulge out and the flaming oil spread in all directions.

The bow lifted gracefully for a heartbreaking second, poised in the air while fire whipped through below it, and without further warning the little vessel sank by its stern.

At once the entire surface flashed with fire as the oil that remained in the tanks rose to the top. It spread in all directions, even up into the wind. Great clouds of black smoke rolled out. Inland, on the pier itself, a single white stream arched over the lumber piles, then another, and another—three engine lines, wasted, wetting down the stacks of timber where there was no fire.

"They'll get no closer'n that to it, them and their pretty red toys," Sullivan told Kurner, "I've a mind they'll be thankful for a boatline this time. Teach Kehoe a mite of respect."

"Where'll we hook on?" Kurner demanded.

"In a bit farther. Can't take no chances right now, Kurner, going into that oil. We'll drive it off shore and cool it. Sound off report signal now."

Kurner reached overhead and pulled twice on the wooden handle of the whistle lanyard. The *Geyser* howled two long blasts. Ashore, at the end of the slip a small, distant figure waved a white helmet in a circle.

"One of the big boys," Sullivan said, "tellin' us to get busy. Use our own judgment."

O'Reilly turned loose his stream from Black Tom, the big water gun atop the lattice mast. It roared down past the engine room and funnel, cutting at an angle across the portside rail. The widening circle of blazing oil halted abruptly, as if surprised at this sudden, cold onslaught. White steam spurted and the fire retreated.

Bjorgerson, standing at the bow pipe, his hand on the watergate, waited impatiently, helmet drawn down over his face, his right arm shielding his eyes from the heat.

"Close enough?" Kurner demanded.

"Closer," Sullivan said. He spoke through tight lips. Already the heat was blistering his face, as it was peeling the white paint off the superstructure of his boat. Two railroad tugs, racing across the river, turned their fire lines toward the dock. His own engines turned over more slowly.

"Make fast alongside the pier," he bade, "close as you can get."

The boat edged neared through the black smoke. Fire rolled out between the piling just ahead. The iron shed spit smoke from every loose seam. Inland on the dock, two more impotent streams had joined the first three.

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"Water!" Sullivan roared.

Rail pipes, pilothouse pipe and bow pipe cut loose at once, flinging a thundering deluge of water upon pier and water and shed. Ten thousand gallons a minute poured out of the wide, smooth-bore tips. The flame, racing crazily backward and forward across the surface of the harbor, scurried away, to be met in its flight by the streams of water from the circling railroad tugs.

"Drive it out from under!" Sullivan commanded Dugan. "Get a line below! Flat tip—give it a water curtain down below through a port!"

His voice always took on a shrill, high quality when the streams were pouring, like a circular saw in a knot. Below in the little vessel the pumps were churning, so that the deckboards trembled and all about the boat the air vibrated with a low, bass note. The streams, driving through the wind, carried their rumbling vibration to the very air. Then it was, always, that Pat Sullivan's voice would lift, shrieking its orders in a harsh falsetto.

"Alongside!" he was crying at Kurner. "Closer! This ain't a red wagon, man, it's a boat!"

Heat, rolling up from beneath the pier, striking down from above, riding the wind around the corners of the shed, battered his face so that it blotched crimson and white.

The fireboat thumped the dock. Sullivan, who had stood in the pilothouse windows, slid down the ladder to the Geyser's deck. Even he must halt there for a heartbeat, in the protection of the forecastle. Bjorgerson, crouching behind the bow pipe, hid his face in his two gloves. Sullivan squinted at him through the smoke, then rounded the corner to the forward deck, and facing the heat, began to unreel the boatline.

The rubber came off in black smudges on his hands; smeared the deck where it touched in heavy loops.

Sullivan counted the sections: one—three—five; counted them by the immense brass couplings, with their catch knobs for the hose spanner, fifty feet apart; five sections—two hundred fifty feet. With his back to the fire that was pounding over the bow he began to drag. He pulled the line aft along the port side of the deck, making a black path where the hot rubber scraped the planks.

THE rail of the fireboat was even with the pier. Sheltered by a lumber pile, Sullivan paused, squinting across the hot concrete. The floor of the burning dock wavered while he stared at it, trembling as cool wind and the heat of the fire contended. In the center he saw the white arching line of a land company's stream. It was playing bravely on the warehouse, but as it stretched upward in an arc it broke and fell in white water that turned to steam and blew away uselessly down the hot wind.

The sight pleased Sullivan unreasonably. "The red wagons ain't doin' so well," he muttered.

Over his head the thunder of the gun stream from his own Black Tom shook the air. Motioning to Dugan to follow him, Sullivan climbed to the dock. On hands and knees, behind sheltering lumber piles, he crawled with a jerky, uncertain motion toward the center, dragging the black hose after him as the men on deck paid it out.

At the first of the railroad tracks he halted again. A current of heat was running along it, and by twisting his head, he could squint into the warehouse at the end of the pier. Flame was twisting up from lumber piles there. And no water near it. Neither land or boat company could venture close. On the side toward the river blazing oil would keep off interference; landward, with the wind from the west, no man could live through the heat.

Sullivan thought quickly. Back, toward the shore, he saw two hose companies, crouched about their nozzles, flinging impotent streams. He dodged across the track, taking for a moment the terrific onslaught of the fire.

Looking toward his boat, he saw Dugan crawling after him, and Mitzell, staggering back to safety with Lyons in his arms. Lyons had been knocked out.

"Belongs on the wagons," Sullivan muttered. "Leave a bit of warm weather get him!"

He paused, waiting, while Dugan leaped

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across the first track. Speech was impossible. Sullivan touched him, pointed ahead with a burned glove, and then indicated the line. Together they dragged. The brass pipe caught stubbornly under a pile and Dugan crawled back to release it.

As he approached the second track, Sullivan cried out. Here was where he had planned to set up his line. To strap it securely to some ring or tie, and drown the fire. But as he stared through the heat, he saw a single line of white hose stretch past him toward the warehouse.

White hose! A land company line! A single bold land company had ventured farther than he yet had dared. His mind flashed to Kehoe, whose company was first due at this location, who probably got here before the flames had spread. He turned on Dugan; even above the roar of fire, his voice lifted: "Somebody got burnt!"

For it was impossible that anyone be alive in that warehouse. Yet the hose was charged, fat with pressure. Someone had dared the fire, had crawled through a hornets' nest of hell to meet it. In that case—certainly the crew of the *Geyser* could follow, too.

He started to crawl forward. Suddenly from behind a lumber pile just inland from the one where Sullivan crouched, a man rose unsteadily in the smoke. The fireboat captain, peering through half baked eyes, recognized the white rubber slicker and white helmet as belonging to a chief. What one, he could not see for a moment. Then the officer charged heavily across the open space and dropped, panting, his skin burned away from his face.

It was the same battalion chief of the previous occasions. The one who objected to a boatline. The sandy haired johnny-jump-up. The false alarm who had got a good, ambitious captain in trouble with headquarters.

The chief's mouth was open. He was trying to shout. Sullivan bent his head to the other's lips.

"Get 'em!" the man whispered. "Kehoe—whole company—in there."

He pointed a charred glove toward the warehouse.

"Whole company?" Sullivan turned. Five men beside Kehoe—frying.

"Listen, Dugan!" He was panting. The heat caught his lungs, seemed to squeeze the air out of them. His voice rasped up again like the saw in a knot. "Get the boys," he ordered. "Bring small line. Spray tip. Understand?"

Dugan nodded. He crawled away quickly toward the fireboat. In less than a minute Sullivan saw him returning, still on hands and knees. He was struggling with a second boatline, a three-inch black hose. The nozzle spread out flat, like an adder's head, with wide, thin lips.

Lyons followed. Behind him crawled Petty. Dugan waved his hand.

Answering water spurted out of the thin lips of the spray tip. It spread in a curtain, flinging a thin spray ahead of it. Not a fire stream, merely a flimsy curtain, to break the heat.

"Up!" Sullivan bade. The battalion chief held back for an unhappy second. "Up, I say!" Sullivan growled. "You can't lay down. Grab the pipe!"

This time it was the boat captain who commanded. The chief obeyed.

"Where's he at?" Sullivan screamed. "Where's Kehoe at?"

"This end of shed," the chief answered thinly. His lips were split.

"Where's he at?" Sullivan repeated.

"Lumber piles—fell—under piles—this end."

"Brace your feet," Sullivan ordered. As he crept around the corner of the lumber into the path of the heat he signaled for water with his hand, waving back toward the fireboat. The strap which dangled from the pipe caught on a stick as he did so. He yanked it free and snapped it to a ringbolt in the concrete floor. Air roared out of the nozzle, followed by the stream.

PETTY was handling the spray tip behind them, covering them with a thin cooling shower. Dugan, the chief of battalion and Lyons grasped the pipe. Sulli-

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van guided the tip. He felt the backward pressure of the stream and the rush of wind it made. Fire, rolling out of the end of the shed, took the onslaught fearlessly a moment, then retreated. Two minutes he held thus, then slowly shut down his valve.

"Up at it," he commanded.

Twice more he halted. Twice more advanced. Then he saw the tumbled lumber-piles, just inside the wide doors. Fire was leaping down on them from above, circling around them in a crazy dance.

Sullivan aimed the tip. He opened the shut-off. The stream once more leaped out. Straight as the shaft of his own boat it bored at the top of the lumber heap. Planks tumbled off, driven by the force of the blow. They scattered before the attack. One minute Sullivan held.

"Up at it."

Again and again and again. The battalion chief stumbled at last. He lay still and Dugan moved him aside, out of the draft. A dozen paces stretched between the warehouse door and the little handful of men. Across it, along the concrete floor, water from their stream ran back to meet them, steaming hot. It bit their hands and wrists and knees.

"Up little more," Sullivan whispered.

Board after board gave way before the driving stream. The pile which concealed the crew of Engine 281 was half its original height. Sullivan raked it, scattering the planks. Fire retreated again from the entry. Less heat struck out.

"Let's go in."

Sullivan's voice scratched in his blistered throat. Again he reduced his stream, again hitched forward. He motioned Dugan to the tip. Petty followed with the spray curtain. Flat on the floor, helmet tight on his head while the rubber melted from his slicker. Sullivan crawled in. Blindly, feeling his way with raw hands, he followed the hard, white land company hose.

He tore, sightlessly, at the remaining boards. Heard cries in answer to his cry. Saw water spilling out which he had not thrown. Then, opening his eyes, he made out four men, crouching like dogs in the narrow space under the wreckage of the lumber piles.

The planks had fallen together, leaving a pocket. And from this pocket, with death on all sides of them, the crew of 281 had been fighting a losing battle.

"Come out o' that!" Sullivan croaked.

He reached in with one hand. His fingers, found a fifth man sprawled on his back.

It was Jim Kehoe. Captain Kehoe, who hated boatlines. Who called the fireboat a "mud scow." Who cried about property loss.

Sullivan bent over him. Rubber peeled from his coat as he lifted the commander of 281 up in his sticky arms.

"Wet us down, Dugan," he ordered.

The boat crew covered their retreat. At the inner end of the pier ambulance surgeons waited with police reserves. As he led Kehoe, Kehoe's company and the sandy haired battalion chief back to safety, Sullivan saw the chief of department stride toward him. Kehoe was stirring, talking feverishly.

"Let me down—let me down. . . ."

Sullivan staggered as he obeyed. He had turned toward his boat when the chief of department called:

"Wait a minute there. Kehoe's got something to say."

Two firemen were supporting the engine company commander when the captain of the *Geyser* limped back.

"Thanks, Sullivan," Kehoe panted. "Damn—good—job."

Sullivan wiped his face. A chunk of rubber stuck to his chin. It refused to come off and he jerked, pulling blistered skin with it.

"That all?" he asked.

"That's all," Kehoe answered. "Good man—better man than me."

"You're all wrong, Kehoe," Sullivan croaked. "All wrong. Not a bit better man. It was the line done it. Not me. The boatline."

He swayed.

"If that's all, sir," he said, addressing the chief, "I'll go back to me mud scow."

Another DETZER Firefighting Story Soon!

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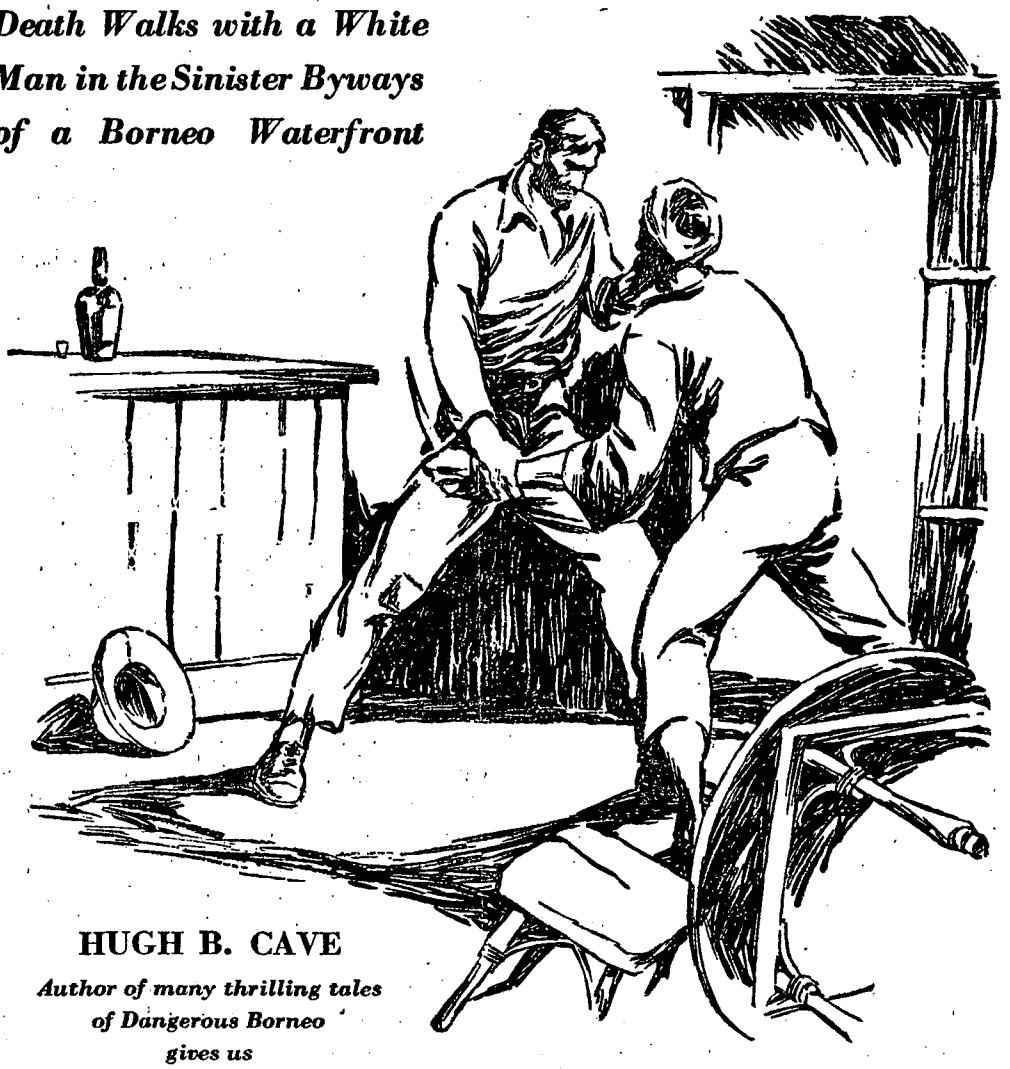
Death Walks with a White Man in the Sinister Byways of a Borneo Waterfront



HUGH B. CAVE

Author of many thrilling tales of Dangerous Borneo gives us

BRING ME HIS BLOOD!

KEMAL SEL, the ancient Singhalese, groped out of his chair and leaned over the saloon counter. For a long while he stared into the drag of cigarette smoke, until his eyes rested on one of the many shadowy figures who sat at the tables. Kemal Sel was very ancient. His eyes were not good.

"Singh Ali!" he called softly.

Through the smoke, the Arab came across the floor and leaned also on the counter. He was a small man, Singh Ali, and young—much younger than Kemal Sel. His face was the color of burned copper and his beard was black. But his eyes, looking into those of the Singhalese, were like the eyes of an adder.

"What is it?" he said quietly.

Kemal Sel leaned closer, until his lips were near to the Arab's face. He spoke in an undertone. What he said was for Singh Ali alone, not for the others.

"You were here in Kuching, Singh Ali, when the white Captain Britt—died?"

"I was here when the white captain was murdered. Yes."

Kemal Sel smiled significantly.

"You knew the white man well, Singh Ali?"

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"I knew him."

"Then you have also heard of the white Captain Halliday, whom they call Johal?"

"I have."

Kemal Sel smiled again.

"And do you know—Johal?" he murmured.

The Arab nodded. He knew what was coming; yet he leaned there, staring into Kemal Sel's dry face, and listened.

"This Captain Johal," the Singhalese said softly, "is the comrade of the Captain Britt—who died. Do you also know that, Singh Ali?"

"I have heard."

"Then I will tell you the rest, Singh Ali. Since Britt died, the Captain Johal has been seen too often in the native quarter of Kuching. He knows more about the manner of Britt's death—than is good. What he does not know, he suspects."

The Arab said nothing. More than ever, he knew what was coming.

"The Captain Johal is becoming dangerous, Singh Ali. You will find me a man whom I can trust. I will give this man much money; and in return for the money he will stick a knife into the Captain Johal's back when the captain is not looking. Do you understand?"

"I understand."

"Then go, and find me the man."

Singh Ali nodded again, and turned away. For a while, Kemal Sel watched him, until the Arab had moved through the haze of smoke, to the door. The door opened softly and closed without a sound.

And Kemal Sel, the ancient Singhalese, was smiling as he shuffled back to his chair.

SINGH ALI, the Arab, wasted no time with his mission. He looked neither to right nor left as he went quietly through the narrow streets of the native quarter. He ignored the shadowed forms who stared at him from murky doorways—slouching, sallow faced men, any one of whom would have stuck a knife into the Captain Johal's back for the sake of a few pieces of silver—or for a finger-nail of white opium!

No; Singh Ali was not interested. The route he followed was a straight one, leading along the waterfront to the European quarter of Kuching. Leading to the headquarters of the British Foreign Service!

And there, thirty minutes later, Singh Ali leaned over the police desk and looked into the face of Captain John Halliday, whom the natives called Johal.

"I have come from Kemal Sel's hangout," the Arab said quietly.

Johal lit a cigarette very slowly, and smiled. It was a significant smile, and revealed a great understanding of Singh Ali, the Arab. Johal had known Singh Ali a long time; and once, in the Dyak jungles of the interior, had saved the Arab from lingering death and cobra bite.

Singh Ali had not forgotten. Arabs are not quick to forget friendship. More than that, Singh Ali, being a renegade Arab, admired the white god Johal, admired the level shoulders and young, straight face, because they were strong and bronzed. Johal might be an unbeliever, a pig of a Christian; but Johal was also a mighty soldier! And Singh Ali, being a son of the northern deserts, loved courage more than black robes. Ayah!

"I have come from Kemal Sel's hangout," he said again, looking into Johal's face.

"Why?"

"Kemal Sel sent me to find a man who, for a handful of silver, would stick a knife in your back!"

Johal looked up very quietly, and continued to smile.

"You are late," he said. "I expected Kemal Sel to send you a long time ago. And have you found a man to kill me?"

"I have not looked, sahib."

"Why?"

Singh Ali stepped back and rolled up the sleeve of his shirt. Quietly he thrust his arm forward, bare to the shoulder, and pointed to a white scar in the flesh.

"I have not forgotten the time you put your lips to this cobra sting, sahib," he said simply, "and sucked the poison until the wound was clean again. That is why I have disobeyed Kemal Sel's order."

Johal stood up and gripped the Arab's arm.

"Thank you, Singh Ali."

"Yes, sahib."

"Listen to me. Three weeks ago, Captain

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Britt was murdered. You know and I know, Singh Ali, why Britt was murdered. He knew too much about Kemal Sel's hangout. We also know that Kemal Sel was responsible for the killing. Is that right?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Britt was my comrade, Singh Ali. Since he was murdered, I have had an unholy desire to take Kemal Sel's black throat between my hands. Now, after what you have just told me, the desire has grown double. Suppose I should go to Kemal Sel's dive, and——"

"No, sahib! *No!"*

Johal's shoulders lifted in a bit of a shrug.

"Why not?" he said simply.

"They would kill you! Kemal Sel is the leader of them—of the whole native quarter. He is their god. If you kill him, they would tear you into little pieces!"

Johal laughed. Meaningly he glanced down at his uniform; then looked up again into the Arab's face.

"And they would tear me into even smaller pieces," he suggested, "because I am a soldier? Is that right, Singh Ali?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Fair enough, Singh Ali. You may go, now."

THE Arab turned and went. As he pulled the door shut, the white man's voice came to him in a last warning.

"Do not go near Kemal Sel's hangout, Singh Ali! And be very careful that a knife does not slip between your ribs from behind. Say nothing to anyone!"

"Yes, sahib."

Captain John Halliday, of the British Foreign Service in Borneo, went back to his desk.

It was dusk when Singh Ali crept back to the native quarter of Kuching. The evil streets were dark, and the incessant patter of naked feet no longer echoed over the cobblestones. A few gaunt faces looked into the Arab's features; but that was all. A few eyes were staring; but those particular eyes always stared and were ever unseeing. They did not matter. They were blurred with opium.

Singh Ali did not notice them, nor did he return to Kemal Sel's saloon, near the waterfront. The Arab sought only to reach his own dwelling. There, under cover of four musty walls, he could hide, until Captain Johal said it was safe to come forth again.

But Kemal Sel, in his saloon near the waterfront, was waiting. Above all else, Kemal Sel did not like to wait.

For a long, long time the Singhalese sat behind his counter. He did not move, not once. But slowly, as the streets of the evil quarter grew darker and heavier with shadow, and the door of the saloon did not open, Kemal Sel's lips tightened.

In the end, the Singhalese moved out of his chair and went to one of the many tables. Four men sat at the table, with cards and money. Kemal Sel leaned over the back of one of them, and whispered.

The fellow turned slowly, and looked up. He, too, was a Singhalese, with unclean face and ugly mouth.

"Singh Ali?" this fellow murmured. "And shall I bring him—here?"

Kemal Sel's lips became even tighter, and very bitter. He shook his head.

"No," he said very softly. "Kill him!"

The native got up and placed his cards face down on the table. Very quietly he pushed back his chair.

"I will be back," he said to the other three. "Hold my place, I have a little matter to attend to."

Then he went; and Kemal Sel, the god of the native quarter, moved silently back to the chair behind the counter. His face was impassive. Only the eyes revealed emotion; but the eyes were angry. Above all else, Kemal Sel did not like to be disobeyed, especially by Singh Ali, who was only a pig of an Arab!

Many minutes later, the door of the saloon swung open. Kemal Sel looked up without speaking. He did not know the man who had entered. He was not interested.

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The fellow was a white man. As he stumbled across the floor to the nearest empty table, Kemal Sel looked closer. No; the fellow was not a white man. Once, a long time ago, he might have been, but his clothes were ragged, filthy, his face was unwashed, and the hair crawled over his eyes. He was very drunk, and the empty stare of his eyes seemed to be an opium stare.

It was not strange. Kemal Sel had seen many other like him. Derelicts, drifting through the South Seas. The lowest dregs of white civilization. Borneo, Java, Malaysia, The Celebes—all full of them.

Nevertheless, Kemal Sel stared. As a rule, the Singhalese ignored these white adventurers—unless they were very drunk, and then he gave them more to drink, until it was easy for black fingers to slide into their pockets. But tonight Kemal Sel was more than interested. Perhaps, for a handful of money, this derelict might be hired to knife the Captain Johal. Kemal Sel did not love white men. If one of them could be persuaded to kill another, the gods might be inclined to smile!

Kemal Sel waited.

THE stranger ordered whisky, and took it in silence. He spoke to no one. Merely slouched there at the table, until he had drunk a lot too much. Then he thrust the empty bottle aside and sprawled in his chair. Unaware that Kemal Sel, the old Singhalese, was watching him.

And Kemal Sel, after a long time, came out from behind the counter. Very quietly he went to the white man's table and drew back a chair. As he sat down, the stranger looked across at him.

The Singhalese smiled. Leaned forward gently. His tapered fingers rested on the white man's arm.

"You have a name, sahib?" Kemal Sel murmured.

The fellow jerked his head up, to stare.

"A name? Sure I got a name. What of it?"

His voice was rasping, and not at all pleasant. It smelled of bad whisky. But Kemal Sel leaned a bit closer.

"If I like your name, sahib, I might——"

"The name's McHenry."

"I might find you some new clothes, and give you much money."

"Money?" McHenry's eyes narrowed. Distrustful eyes! "What for?"

"You are too quick," Kemal said softly. "First—let me look at you."

The Singalese bent all the way over the table, and peered into McHenry's face. Kemal Sel's eyes were poor. It was necessary to come very close, so that there might be no mistake!

Yes; there was no mistake. Kemal Sel was sure of it. This derelict before him would do the work nicely. He was precisely the kind of man to do it. Narrow eyes, bitter mouth, and hair that crawled low on the forehead. Kemal Sel was a good reader of character, though his eyes were not good.

"You have been long in Kuching?" he said evenly.

"Long in this blasted hole? No? Nor I won't be!"

"But you would like to go away with clean clothes and a pocket filled with money? Yes?"

"Maybe I would. What of it?"

"I will tell you what of it," Kemal Sel smiled. "There is a white man in Kuching who does not like me. He is a foolish white man; he walks through the native quarter at night, with his eyes shut. It would be easy—so easy—to—stick a knife into him when his eyes are shut!"

"And you want me to do it for you?"

"Perhaps."

McHenry grinned, and poured himself another drink. When he had drained the glass, he leaned forward again.

"How much do I get?" he demanded.

"Much money. A handful of gold now—and a handful of gold later, when it is done."

"And who's the guy?"

"His name is Halliday. Captain—John—Halliday. They call him Johal."

McHenry stiffened. For a moment he looked straight at Kemal Sel, as if he were waiting for the Singhalese to say something more. Then his lips twisted into a significant snarl.

"Johal is it?" he said bitterly. "And he comes through the native quarter at night,

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with his eyes shut. Captain John Halliday!"

The rest came harshly, abruptly.

"And you're goin' to pay me good money to kill Johal. Pay *me*—when I been waitin' for the chance for five years! Look here, you—Halliday's got it comin' to him. I got an old score to settle. You just hand over the pay and I'll do the job—right!"

KEMAL SEL smiled, very slowly. It was the work of the gods, this meeting with McHenry. The gods had sent the white man to Kemal Sel's hangout just in time to fit in with Kemal Sel's plans! McHenry was the best man in Borneo to do the work. He already hated Johal!

Kemal Sel's hand groped down into the pocket of his coat. When the hand came out again it slid across the table and closed over McHenry's fingers. McHenry looked down, and grinned. It was a lot of money!

"Tonight," Kemal Sel murmured, "you will return for the rest. And you will bring me proof that Johal is dead!"

McHenry grinned again, and dropped the money into his own pocket. Without a word he poured himself another drink. Five minutes later he got up and stumbled across the room. As he pulled open the door, he turned for an instant and looked back. He was still grinning.

Kemal Sel, the ancient Singhalese, was sitting behind the counter.

Many hours later, Kemal Sel was still sitting there. The saloon was empty, and very quiet. The only light was the yellow glare of an oil lamp, hanging from a bracket over Kemal Sel's head.

Outside, too, the narrow street was deserted and still. It was too early for the night shadows.

Kemal Sel did not see the white man who stepped deliberately out of the dark and opened the door of the saloon. But Kemal Sel, in his usual place behind the counter, heard the door scrape open.

He looked up slowly as the white man came straight to the counter. But it was dark, and Kemal Sel's eyes were not good enough to see the man's face.

The Singhalese said nothing until the white man stood over him. Then, as the light fell on the man's features, Kemal Sel jerked up. The man was Johal.

"You—sahib?" the Singhalese faltered. "I did not expect——"

"No. You expected McHenry."

Kemal Sel looked into the captain's eyes,

and stared. He did not understand. But he was a Singhalese, and the Singhalese are an impassive, unemotional race. They are clever.

"Mc Henry?" Kemal Sel said quietly. "Who is he?"

"He is a white man, Kemal Sel. The same white man whom you sent to—kill me."

"I do not know him, sahib. And why should I want to kill you?"

"Perhaps because I know too much about the man you have already killed. Britt was my friend, Kemal Sel. You have been playing with death."

"And who is Britt?"

Johal stepped back, deliberately. His lips were thin, and revealed a trace of anger. He did not love Kemal Sel's soft subtlety.

"I will tell you something," he said curtly. "You are clever, Kemal Sel—like a cobra. But you are a poor judge of character, and you picked the wrong man. McHenry told you he hated me. He doesn't hate me; he is my friend. And he came to me directly, to tell me the truth of your rotten soul. That is all."

"That is—all, sahib?" Kemal Sel's eyes were almost closed, burning like the eyes of a deadly snake.

"If you send another man to kill me, I will come here and kill *you*. Understand?"

KEMAL SEL understood, but he smiled significantly.

"You will not kill me, sahib," he murmured. "If you do, the Arabs and Pathans and Dyaks and my own countrymen would pull you into little pieces. What is it you call it? *Hack*—that is it. The natives would hack you until the biggest piece of you would be no larger than a cockroach. Yes, sahib!"

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But Johal was not listening. He had turned, deliberately, and was closing the door behind him as he went out.

In the unlighted street outside, he turned abruptly and walked with quick steps. The plan, so far, had worked nicely; but the night was not yet over. There was much to be done, and that much had to be done quickly, before the glare of hate died from Kemal Sel's eyes. Everything, positively everything, depended on that particular glare of hate!

The native quarter was darker now, and the silence was broken by an occasional patter of footsteps. Johal paid no attention to them. His destination lay in a very narrow, obscure street behind the water-front; and the sooner he reached that certain street, the better.

The street was empty when he found it. No footsteps here. No sallow faces, staring from black doorways. Nothing but a row of sinister, two-story buildings, hanging over the sidewalk.

In one of the black doorways, Jahal stopped. Very quietly he stepped forward to push open the door. And then he stood motionless. His lips tightened a little.

The door was already open. Standing half ajar, revealing the musty passage inside. And it was not like Singh Ali, the Arab, not like him at all, to leave his door open! Singh Ali knew better!

Cautiously, Johal stepped over the sill. He moved slowly now, and very deliberately. He made no sound at all as he groped along the corridor to the foot of the stairs. His hand went out to grip the railing, and he was no more than a shadow as he climbed slowly to the upper landing.

Halfway up he stopped again and stood motionless. This time there was a definite reason. Above him, on the wooden landing, the boards had creaked under the weight of a man's body. Naked feet were moving very carefully across the floor!

Johal waited. The footsteps were silent again. A thin line of light crept across the landing as a door was pushed slowly open, somewhere near the top of the stairs.

And then, with startling abruptness, came a single rasping oath, in Arabic.

"Son of a dog!"

The door closed with a thud, smothering the oath. In the next moment, Johal was at the top of the stairs, running along the landing.

In ten seconds he reached the door of Singh Ali's room. His fingers closed over the knob. His shoulder smashed into the wood. The door clattered open.

It was luck, sheer luck, that the bullet missed him. The shot spit across the room just as Johal lurched across the sill. The slug of lead droned past his head and *pinged* into the wall.

But it was a stray shot—and the only shot. It came from the floor; and the revolver had already slipped from the native's hand. The fellow lay there, sprawled against the wall, with a long handled *parang* sticking out of his breast. Already dead.

Johal stared at him; then turned quietly to Singh Ali. The Arab was standing by the table, on the other side of the room. His belt, which usually held a knife, was empty. Evidently he had drawn the *parang* and hurled it—just in time.

WITHOUT a word, Singh Ali went to the dead man and bent down. With his foot he turned the native over, and looked for a long time into the black face. Then, without emotion, he drew out the knife, wiped the blood from it, and replaced it in his belt.

Turning, he looked quietly at Johal.

"The man is a Singhalese, sahib," he said. "I have seen him many times, playing fan-tan in Kemal Sel's saloon. Kemal Sel sent him to kill me."

"To kill you? Why?"

"Because I did not obey Kemal Sel's orders, sahib."

Johal moved forward and looked into the dead native's face. It was an ugly face, unwashed and twisted. And the mouth was set in an expression of sudden bewilderment.

"You were lucky, Singh Ali," Johal said softly.

"No, sahib. Not lucky. I expected him."

"Just the same, you were——"

"I was waiting for him, sahib. I knew he would come, and I was listening. He made a noise, coming up the stairs; and when he opened the door, I was ready."

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Johal looked straight into the Arab's face. There was admiration in that look.

"You were ready with a knife—and he had a gun. The odds were a bit uncertain, Singh Ali."

"Yes, sahib. But he did not use the gun, until the knife was already sticking out of him. He was too slow."

Johal went to the table and pulled back a chair. He was smiling. The Arab, with a shrug of indifference, moved to his side and stood there.

"May I sit down, sahib?"

"Sit down and—listen."

Singh Ali, too, drew back a chair and sat in it. He waited patiently for the white man to speak; and in a moment he was rewarded. Johal bent forward.

"I have arranged a little affair of my own, Singh Ali," he said quietly. "There will be more fighting before the night is over."

"Yes, sahib."

"You will go to Kemal Sel's hangout, and wait there. Before you have waited very long, a white man will come. The kind of white man who has no money and drinks a great deal of bad whisky. His name is McHenry."

Singh Ali nodded, and said nothing.

"Kemal Sel hates this man," Johal continued. "His hate is great, like the hate of a cobra for the man who has stepped on it. Kemal Sel will—well, what *will* he do, Singh Ali, to a man he despises?"

"He will call the white man into the inner room, sahib, which is behind the saloon. And he will shoot him."

"He is a good shot, eh?"

"He can pull the trigger of a gun quicker than any man in Kuching, sahib. He is not so old as he seems!"

Johal leaned back very quietly. "He will have to be very young and very quick, Singh Ali, to kill McHenry. McHenry is my friend. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sahib. McHenry is your friend."

"Then you will go to Kemal Sel's saloon, Singh Ali, and wait there. When Kemal Sel and McHenry go into the inner room, you will go directly to the back door of the saloon, which is always locked, and unlock it. You will stand there, no matter what happens, and *keep that door open*—until McHenry comes out again. And you will make sure that you are not seen."

"I will be a shadow, sahib."

"You will need to be. McHenry is going to kill Kemal Sel, to repay the Singhalese for murdering the Captain Britt. And if the natives know that you have helped McHenry to escape, they will rip you wide open, Singh Ali. You know that."

"They will not see me."

"Good. Then go, Singh Ali; and be sure that the back door of Kemal Sel's saloon is unlocked!"

The Arab got up quietly and went to the door. After he had gone, Johal followed him. Behind, in the shadows of the room, lay Kemal Sel's native messenger, dead.

IT WAS close to midnight when Singh Ali, the Arab, stepped across the sill of Kemal Sel's hangout. Kemal Sel was once more sitting behind the counter, and his eyes narrowed. He waited a moment, until the Arab had closed the door; then he leaned forward and called out.

"Singh Ali!" The name was ominously soft, and bitter.

Singh Ali went to the counter and stood there quietly, while the Singhalese looked at him. Then:

"Where have you been?" asked Kemal Sel.

"Looking for a man," the Arab lied, "to kill the white Captain Johal. As you told me."

"And did you—find one?"

"No. It is not easy to find a man who will do murder for a mere handful of gold, Kemal Sel."

Kemal Sel's face revealed no emotion. It was stolid, expressionless, as it stared into the Arab's.

"You have seen Johal?" the Singhalese demanded.

"Yes. An hour ago."

"Where!"

Singh Ali hesitated. If he told the truth,

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Kemal Sel might send a shadow to find the captain. Consequently, he lied.

"In the white quarter of Kuching," he said deliberately.

Kemal Sel smiled. Without a sound he groped out of his chair and came from behind the counter. He brushed past Singh Ali as if the Arab had no longer been standing there. With slow steps he walked across the room to a table in the far corner, where three men played cards.

Singh Ali turned to watch him. A sudden glint had come into the Arab's eyes; and he waited tensely until Kemal Sel had reached the dark corner of the room. Then, when the Singhalese bent over the three men who sat there, Singh Ali stepped abruptly to the counter—and bent down.

His hand slid across the board quick as a snake, and closed over the handle of a drawer—a drawer that was hardly noticeable, built into the under part of the counter. He pulled it open quickly, and reached down.

His fingers found a revolver, Kemal Sel's revolver. Just for a moment they fumbled with it, and then let it fall again. The drawer slid back into place. Singh Ali straightened up without making the slightest noise.

An instant later, when Kemal Sel returned, Singh Ali was leaning indifferently on the counter. To all appearances, he had not shifted his position, had not moved.

Kemal Sel leaned toward him, very quietly.

"I have sent a man to the European quarter, Singh Ali," he said significantly. "The man has a knife, and will use it. If you have lied to me——"

Singh Ali shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"I never lie, except when it is necessary," he replied.

There was a meaning behind the words. Kemal Sel only half understood them. He bent closer; and his eyes were narrowed to little slits.

"I do not trust you, Singh Ali," he said very slowly. "One of these days——"

Kemal Sel stopped talking. His eyes, staring into the Arab's face, had shifted a quarter of an inch, and were watching the door of the saloon swing open. The man in the doorway was a white man, with ragged, unwashed clothing. He staggered, as if he had been drinking too much whisky. He was McHenry.

Kemal Sel dropped back, with amazing swiftness. His hand jerked down and pulled open the little drawer under the counter. He took the revolver that lay there, took it and slipped it into the folds of his long coat. Then he turned.

"Listen to me, Singh Ali," he rasped. "When the white man sits down, you will go to him and bring him to the inner room. I want to talk to him—alone. *See?*"

The Arab nodded. He saw, and he understood. Any time Kemal Sel took that revolver from the drawer and slid it into his coat, there was murder to come. And it was always the inner room! Yes, Singh Ali understood!

The Singhalese bent over. His fingers gripped Singh Ali's wrist.

"If you fail...." The words were deadly soft.

"I will not fail," the Arab promised.

Kemal Sel moved away, quickly. For a moment he was visible—a shadow creeping along behind the counter—then the door at the end of the passage opened and closed, and the Singhalese was gone.

McHenry, the white man, had stumbled to the nearest table and dropped into a chair.

SINGH ALI, the Arab, waited a moment and then went quietly to the white man's table. His hand touched McHenry's shoulder.

"Kemal Sel wishes to speak with you," he said.

McHenry's head came up with a jerk. The bleary eyes glared into the Arab's face.

"Wants to see me, does he? Where the hell is he?"

"In the inner room, sahib."

"All right." McHenry pushed himself up with an effort. "Show me the way, feller."

Singh Ali looked into the man's face. His eyes widened for just an instant. Those eyes were keen, not like the half blind eyes of Kemal Sel.

Then, without speaking, Singh Ali led

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the way to the closed door at the end of the counter.

"It is here, sahib."

McHenry nodded, and stepped forward. "All right. Thanks."

Singh Ali stepped back—and turned away quickly.

McHenry stood there for a moment, staring at the door. Then, with clumsy fingers, he turned the knob and pushed the door open.

Strangely enough, as he crossed the sill his steps were no longer unsteady, no longer drunk. And when he turned, after drawing the door shut, his eyes were clear, not bleary. He was alert, ready. He met the treacherous stare of Kemal Sel with a quiet, casual smile of understanding.

They were alone, the two of them. Kemal Sel stood in the center of the room, holding back a chair for the white man to sit down. And McHenry, with one hand in his pocket holding a ready revolver, went to the chair and sat down.

"You sent for me?" he said quietly.

Kemal Sel nodded. His face was unpleasantly close to McHenry's, and came even closer as he lowered himself into a chair and leaned on the table.

"Do you know, sahib," he said, "what happens to men who betray a trust?"

"Do I know what?"

"I will tell you something, McHenry. There was once a sahib white man who needed money. The gods sent him to a saloon, near the waterfront of an evil place in Borneo. And there he met a Singhalese who was the leader of the native quarter."

Kemal Sel smiled discreetly. McHenry pushed back his chair and half got up, then sat down again.

"What the hell are you spillin' about?" he demanded.

"A story, sahib. Nothing of importance. You see, the Singhalese gave the white man much money, and in return for the money the white man agreed to kill another white man. It was all very simple. But instead of keeping his promise, the derelict went straight to the second white man and told him—everything."

"He did, hey?" McHenry was quite stupid. "And what happened?"

"What do you think happened, sahib?"

"Hell! The Singhalese probably stuck a knife in the derelict feller's belly. That's the way they do things in Born——"

Kemal Sel had risen slowly from his chair, and was leaning on the table. His hand—his right hand—was hidden in the folds of his long coat.

"You are right, McHenry sahib. That is the way they do things in Borneo!"

McHenry knew the meaning of it then. Perhaps he had known it all along; but now the significance of Kemal Sel's threat was deadly.

THE white man spun back, lurching to his feet as the chair clattered against the wall. He was quick, and he was no longer even the slightest bit drunk. His hand came out of his pocket like a snake.

But a man's pocket, especially if it be ragged, is treacherous. It is apt to catch, and hold; and for a single split second it caught and held McHenry's gun. Just time enough for Kemal Sel to move first.

The Singhalese was like a cat. His tapered fingers slid out of the long black coat with terrible swiftness. Before McHenry could wrench his hand clear of the infernal ripped pocket, Kemal Sel's revolver swung on a dead line with his chest, and the Singhalese pressed the trigger.

There was no report. Nothing but a dead, ominous click. And before the yellow finger could curl again in the trigger guard, McHenry whipped forward.

The white man's left hand shot down, and closed over Kemal Sel's wrist. McHenry's fingers were hard. They tightened cruelly and wrenched upward. Kemal Sel's wrist snapped. The revolver dropped to the floor.

Kemal Sel's face was a twisted thing, full of hate. He was wounded, and old; but he was altogether like a tiger. And a native *parang,* with keen blade and long handle, still hung in his belt.

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Even as McHenry's fingers closed over his throat, the Singhalese groped down and gripped the knife. The blade came up, with a sudden wrench, into the white man's thigh.

McHenry saw it—too late. The steel cut into him, ripping through his clothing. He fell back, with a thin streak of red running the entire length of his side from the pit of his arm almost to the knee. And then, with a bitter sob, he stepped in again.

His left hand closed over Kemal Sel's knife arm. Closed savagely, relentlessly, and with crushing force. Under the strength of it, the Singhalese spun around, off balance. And McHenry's fist, like a block of steel, crashed into his yellow face.

After that, McHenry stumbled back and stood by the table, holding himself up with both hands. Kemal Sel careened over the floor, into the wall, and slid face down in the corner. His features were no longer harmonious. They were scattered, bloody—and the Singhalese was no longer breathing.

McHenry went to the door and drew his gun. Before he reached for the knob, he turned to look once more at the dead man.

"That," he said quietly, "was coming to you. For murdering Jack Britt!"

Then, a bit unsteadily, he opened the door and stepped into the main saloon. The revolver was in his hand, ready to be used; and a dozen native faces, sitting at the tables, were staring at him.

Without a word he moved along the wall, in full view of them. They did not move. They did not know, yet, that he had killed their god.

He did not take his eyes off them. Twenty paces, thirty, he moved along the wall of the saloon, until he reached the darkest corner of the room. There, groping behind him along the wall, he found the door that led to the rear exit.

And there, as he pushed the door open, he looked directly into the many staring faces and said:

"You will find Kemal Sel in the other room—all of you. If you want to know who killed him, I did!"

The natives stared for a moment longer, bewildered. Then like a pack of dogs, they left the tables and surged across the floor. But the door had closed. The white man, who had stood there and told them deliberately that he had murdered their leader, was gone.

They were slow in reaching the door. Too slow by a full minute. On the other side of the barrier, McHenry was running through the musty passage, groping along the wall.

At the end of the passage, a silent figure was waiting for him. And the door, leading to the narrow street in the rear of Kemal Sel's hangout, was open.

McHenry stopped as he reached it. Abruptly he gripped the arm of the man who was waiting there, and dragged the fellow with him as he stumbled across the threshold. Then, turning quickly, he threw his weight against the door and closed it.

Kemal Sel had long ago fitted that door with a safety lock. It could be opened from the inside, if one knew the secret; but the opening would take many minutes of precious time. And McHenry, standing in the darkness outside, needed only a moment.

He swung about to face the man who stood beside him. His lips were set, to hold back the pain of his torn flesh. but he managed to smile.

"You have done well, Singh Ali," he said. "No man could have done better. Now get out of here quickly. Go to the government residence and tell Johal what has happened."

Singh Ali, the Arab, stepped back into the shadows and disappeared.

And McHenry, turning in the opposite direction, ran quickly—as quickly as the knife thrust would let him— along the narrow street.

IT WAS an hour later when Singh Ali, the Arab, stood over the desk in the headquarters of the British Foreign Service. Captain John Halliday sat there looking up at him.

"So Kemal Sel is dead—at last," Johal said quietly.

"Yes, sahib. McHenry killed him,"

"And where is McHenry?"

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"I do not know, sahib. That is—perhaps."

Johal pushed back his chair and stood up. He was smiling as he reached for a cigarette and slid the box within reach of Singh Ali's fingers.

"The natives who were in Kemal Sel's hangout at the time," he suggested, "are they searching for the man who killed their god?"

"They are scouring the native quarter, sahib."

"And they are sure to find him, eh? They know precisely what he looks like."

"No, sahib."

Johal looked at the Arab and laughed softly. He stepped out from behind the desk and gripped the Arab's shoulder gratefully. Yet, even as he reached up, his lips tightened with a sudden twinge of pain, and his left hand pressed against his side.

"You are a good soldier. Singh Ali," he murmured. "And you really think that the natives don't know what McHenry looks like?"

"No, sahib. They only *think* they know."

"But you know, eh?"

"I know, sahib. My eyes are good, and when I bent over you in the saloon, to give you Kemal Sel's message——"

"You recognized me. I thought you would, Singh Ali."

"Yes, sahib."

Johal picked up the whole box of cigarettes and put them in the Arab's hand. Then, because the knife wound in his side was still raw, he sat down again.

"I was lucky, Singh Ali," he said softly. "Kemal Sel would have killed me if his gun had not missed fire. Do you know that?"

"Yes, sahib. It was I who took out the bullet."

"You did what?"

"I took out the first bullet, sahib. I would have removed them all, but Kemal Sel was very clever and he would have noticed the difference in weight. So I took out only the first bullet, thinking it would be enough."

Johal leaned on the desk and stared. Stared for a long time without saying anything. Singh Ali, the Arab, stuck one of the cigarettes in his mouth and lit it. When he went out, a moment later, the cigarette was cocked at a comical angle, and Singh Ali was grinning.

The Roar of Western Six-Guns!

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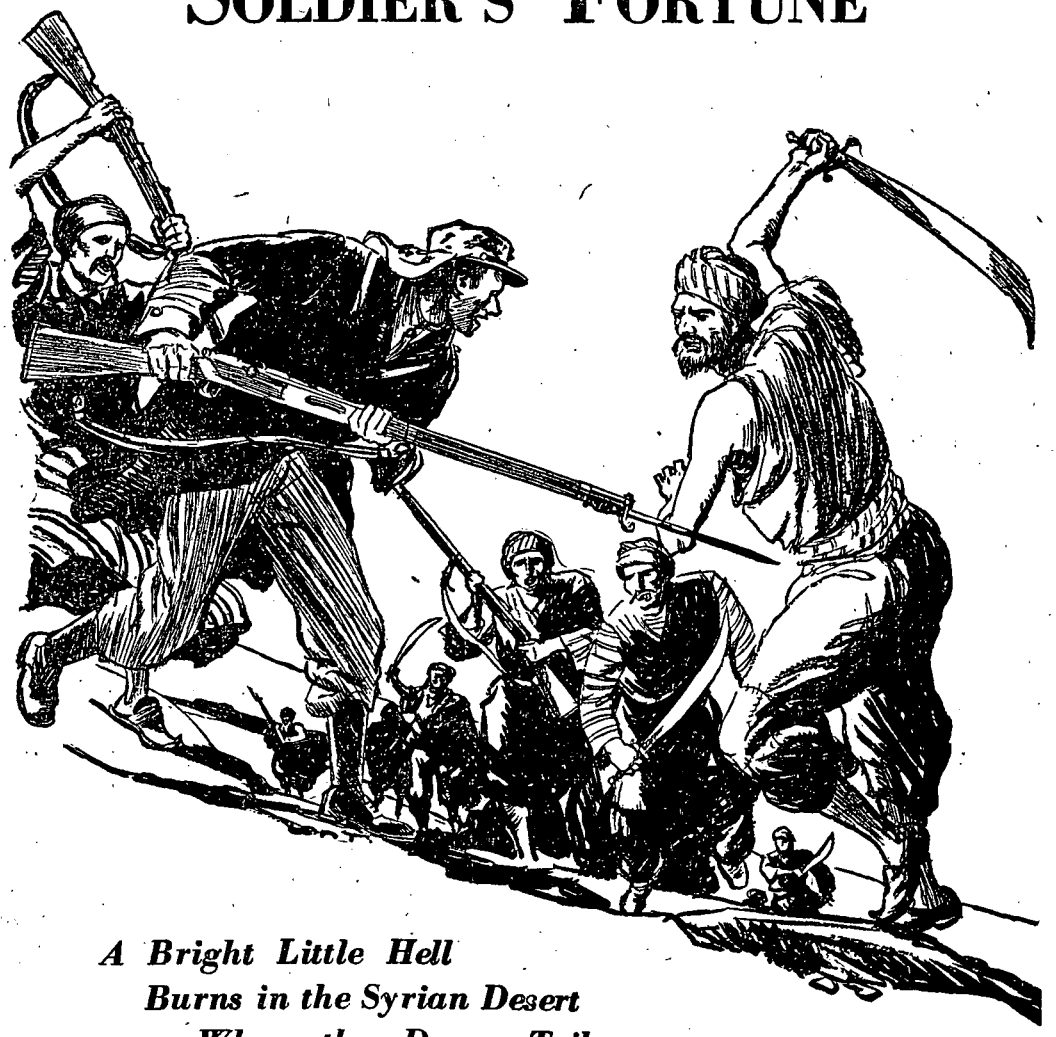
SOLDIER'S FORTUNE



A Bright Little Hell Burns in the Syrian Desert When the Druse Tribesmen Capture a Fighting Legionaire

FROM behind the black-rimmed cloud-scud the moon broke, a small but bright sliver of silver. Its light bathed the bleak expanse of the Syrian *bled,* fell across the slope where the Legion dead lay, piled blackly and stiffly as they had fallen. That light hit at Bregg's closed eyelids, made them smart and quiver, finally open.

Then, very slowly, full consciousness returned to him. His short, strong body ached in every part. His right shoulder and side was a continual flame of pain, from the hours of shock while he had fired Lebels, auto-rifles, and then the one remaining Hotchkiss gun that had not jammed....

It was beside him now, that Hotchkiss. Over its rear tripod-foot hunched the tall and thin form of Thiers, the man who had been the captain of this company of the Legion...."A company of the dead," whispered Bregg, slowly and silently. For they were all dead. All dead but him....

Stiffly, he raised up a bit, to look more closely at Thiers, the captain. The man's *kepi* was beside him, and in the moonlight

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By Robert Carse

Author of "Destiny," "Back Trail," and other splendid stories of the Distant Countries

Bregg could see the shattered skull and the service revolver Thiers clutched with the rigidity of death in his right hand....

The captain had killed himself—rather than let the Jebel Druse get him. But he, Bregg, still lived. "Why?" he asked himself numbly, for the Druse had been in here, had swept the slope. He remembered the first part of that final and terrific attack as the tribesmen had come up the slope and he had knelt with Thiers behind the Hotchkiss just before he had slipped off into that black, cool, deep void of utter exhaustion.

There was only one answer. The Druse, clambering fiercely up over this slope, had mistaken his sprawled and rigid form for that of a dead man's; had not bothered to make sure. And now, he mused, smiling as he thought it, an old soldier's fortune was upon him, and he lived....

Fortune of war. Bregg huskily whispered the words to himself. Then he was silent and the smile left his cracked lips, and he stared off, down that dead-strewn slope and at the moonstruck expanse of the *bled*. He knew too much; had fought too much. And now he saw that the fear which had instinctively come to him had been well based.

The immense Jebel Druse *rezzia* had trapped Thiers and his company on this barren hill; wiped out the company, and retreated, out into the *bled*. All those things were true. But it was also true that the Druse fought for two things: hatred of the French *roumi*, and for French loot. The *roumi*, or so they thought, were all dead. But the loot was still here. Their *emir* had drawn them off into the plain again after the success of that final attack, to make sure of his own flanks and rear, and to see that no other French patrol was near. But now, with the silence and speed of desert jackals, the tribesmen were coming back—up slope, to search and loot the dead.

From where he lay, he could see them.

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The first of them were already at the bottom of the hill, the silver moon radiance bright on their hawk, savage faces, their blood and powder stained *burnouses*....

Under the lining of Bregg's *kepi,* sweat beads started, trickled down his forehead, down his lean, leathery cheeks, to at last drop from his chin. His wide eyes took in the form of Thiers.

"I envy you, *mon capitaine,*" he muttered. "Not a pants' button, not a cartridge pouch, will get past these boys. And for me——"

BENEATH him, but a bit to one side, was his own Lebel rifle, where he had dropped it just before that last attack, and turned to help Thiers with the Hotchkiss. He slid back the bolt: there was at least one cartridge there, which would do for him.... But then he shook his close-cropped head again.

"That stuff ain't ever been for me," he whispered to himself. "No, sir; I've packed a piece like this too long. Twelve years' worth. Let 'em come and take me if they can. Let 'em have what I've got. Then, if they been sloppy an' slow, let 'em put me on their anthill. But, t'hell with that!"

He reached with sore fingers into his cartridge pouch; found the long, smooth, cool Lebel shells there. He slipped them into the gun, and lovingly sent forward and down the bolt. This gun, or a gun just like it, he had packed and fought with twelve years. It was as much a part of him as his right arm, or the crumpled, soiled Legion *kepi* on the back of his throbbing head.

The sweat that had run down his forehead had stopped now. He was very calm, lying there, one hand out along the muzzle to caress *"la Rosalie,"* the beloved and evil Legion bayonet. His narrowed glance, though, was fixed down-slope, on those dark and silent figures who were slowly working up the hill, form body to body, towards him in the moonlight. Around him, he knew, he could in all probability find better weapons: a Chauchat auto' rifle, hand grenades, even a Hotchkiss gun with a belt yet unspent. But there were more than a thousand Druse in that *rezzia* which so grimly and surely ringed the hill, and he was alone. The Lebel and Rosalie were the weapons he knew and liked best. This, after all, was a gesture, the gesture of a soldier and a *Legionaire*....

He grunted then, his lips set in a wild sort of grin, and came upright to one knee. Those silent men who robbed the dead below him had spun around, staring upslope, and he could see their glinting, narrow hawk-like eyes, their fierce faces, the weapons they raised tensely in their hands.

"Come on, yuh!" He yelled it in English. "Come on—up to me!" He fired, at the nearest man; half-saw him topple sidewise as he fired at the second, then the third....

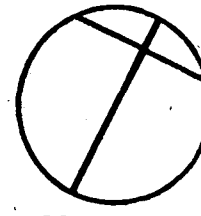
"Yuh won't huh? Well, then, pore old Joe Bregg'll come down!"

He strode down, firing his last few shells, stepping over the dead and stiff forms of the men who, yesterday, had marched, singing and lusty, at his side.

A few bullets cracked at him; one slit the shoulder of his tunic and undervest. But then, from where that man stood at the foot of the hill, he heard the voice of the *emir,* lifted sharply in command, and saw the gleam of a mail-clad arm held high.

"Savvy just what I'm doin', do yuh, *Emir?* Figure me crazy, an' all set fer yer ant-hill and the vultures? Figure again, fella! Figure—hah-ah!"

From shoulder height, he drove the lean bayonet whistling down at the half-naked warrior who sprang at him over a pile of dead, scimitar flickering. That man



coughed, uttered an odd sort of screaming cry, and fell away. Bregg cleared his bayonet. He laughed, not conscious that he did so, and strode on, down the slope.

Many men, far more than he could count or see, were coming at him. He knew that, stumbling towards a little clear space of rock and sand, blood-glazed eyes intent on the innermost ring of them on all sides of him now.

He yelled once—a wild, obscene chal-

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lenge of the Legion—and then was silent, stabbing, side-stepping, whirling, parrying with the beloved Rosalie. They fought with scimitars, most of them; a few clumsily with captured Legion rifles that held the long bayonet. It was those he feared most, for it was those that equalled his own reach, and could get in at his back....

Bregg was a small man, and deceptive. One time in Morocco, on Camerone Day, when the whole Legion had been in maneuvers at Camp Bedeau, he had won the championship of his battalion, and then of his regiment, at personal bayonet drill. For that, he had gotten some small individual attention from his officers, and several weeks of free liquor from his mates. But, since that day, he had never feared another man who held a cutting weapon in combat with him. Not until now.

Now, he knew, the knowledge of it sending a swift and strange chill up his spine, he was done. They had him; they were too many. Twenty men that made a ring of whistling, clashing steel were edging, closing in on him. And he was alone—alone and giddy with exhaustion, staggering as he thrust, stumbling as he parried, already cut and drenched with blood in a dozen places by barely deflected blows.

"One of yuh," he muttered madly. "One of yuh—the biggest. You—yeah!" He screamed as he said it, and rushed that man, the bayonet point a thing that moved faster than light. It was mad, that blow, and savagely and badly delivered. It killed the man he had chosen to kill, but it broke the thin blade short against a rib, wrenched the gun from his hands, flung him stumbling and flat over a dead man. His forehead and chin hit bare rock and ground. His body twitched and convulsed. He tried twice to rise, the *emir's* clear yell of warning command like strange thunder in his ears. Then he was stiff, still, unconscious....

FIRELIGHT beat at his blinking eyes. The acrid smell of burning camel dung made him cough, then moan with agony of the coughing. He rolled over. Pain ran through all his body, and his bound arms and legs tensed against their thongs.

"Be still." The voice was in French, guttural, yet clear.

"Go t'hell!" It was all he could manage. But he stared up, and to one side.

A tall and erectly straight man stood in the doorway of the dark camel's-hair tent. From outside, the firelight played on him. It brought into relief the fine, clear featured face, the deepset and wide eyes, the green turban of a Meccan pilgrim, the marvellous shirt of chain mail, the jewel-set belt and Damascene dagger, the red embossed riding boots below the white, full, silk trousers. One long hand lifted from the jewelled belt, made a slow and quiet gesture down towards him.

"I am *Kaid* here," said the tall man. "You are my prisoner. Be still."

Bregg moaned with the pain of his effort as he tried to sit up.

"Listen," he husked in the terrible French twelve years in the Legion had given him, "listen to me, mug. Where's this ant-hill—and your vultures?"

"You will see them soon enough—filth!" Bregg's burning eyes swung. Another man stood in the door now, and it was he who had spoken. He, too, wore the rich clothing and jewels that only a wealthy and powerful chieftain would dare possess. But he was wholly unlike the other man. He was short, shorter than Bregg himself, and fat. A small and ineffectual beard covered the rolls of his chin. His little, round and dark eyes were set in pouches of fat. Long, grease-sticky curls fell from underneath his headcloth. He stank of perfume, and his voice, when he had spoken, had been high, almost womanish.

At him Bregg stared and grinned, insolently, to look back at the older, taller man.

"Yer sister?"

What might have been a grin came fleetingly over the face of the older man. But he entirely disregarded Bregg, and what he had said.

"Go, Ibn Warana," he said swiftly to the man at his side. "This is my prisoner. This is for me to judge. I will call you—should it be needful."

For a moment, Bregg thought that the

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other was going to speak, or pull forth the dagger at his belt. But he did not, and the thick, pendulant lips met, the quick fire died from the beady eyes, and the man turned, strode on, out of vision and past the fire.

"Now," said the man who stood alone in the doorway of the tent, "it is time you listened to words of thought, *roumi!*"

SOMEHOW, Bregg had drawn himself up into a half-squatting posture. From out of his blood-blackened face his eyes blazed at the Jebel Druse *kaid*.

"What you sellin' me?" he rasped.

The tall, gaunt-faced *kaid* spoke on, as if he had not heard.

"Today, my warriors have killed all of your warriors. You alone are left. But, we do not hate the French any more than we hate the English, or any other *roumi*. Your *rezzia* was guarding much guns and ammunition, on its way to one of your posts. For that I struck. I wanted, and have got that. But my men are desert men; they do not know the full use of all your *roumi* weapons. Nor do I, even though I know some of your tongue. In the desert, towards El Nefuhd, we have a war, a bitter war. I need many guns, for there are many tribes against me. I have taken the guns; and I have taken you. You are a fine warrior——"

"And you can peg me right out on that fire now!" The slowly spoken, beautifully modulated words had for a time hidden their full meaning from Bregg. Now, that he fully understood their meaning, and the meaning still behind them, red and unreasoning rage beat up into his brain. "You can——"

With a grace and rapidity that was wholly startling, the old *kaid* leaned down, and the cold point of his jewelled dagger was against Bregg's sweaty, throbbing throat.

"Silence, *roumi!* Silence! You are a good warrior; else I would have already 'pegged you out.' I do not ask you to fight against the French, against the people of your own tribe. I ask you to fight with me, my tribe, against other tribes of the desert —far to the south. You are a warrior. It is just that I ask you to accept the fortune of a warrior, of a soldier, and fight with me. The alternative? Slow and bitter death. You cannot get away. There is no one of your people between here and Bian-Ouid. That is many days' camel journey across the open *bled*...."

For a moment he stopped, to stare down with those deepset, clear and unwavering eyes into the blood-hazed eyes of the man before him in the tent. Then, in that same, slow, sure voice, he went on:

"I am Rakil-Bauda. I am *emir* and *kaid* of this tribe of the Jebel Druse. In the Nefuhd, the desert, I have other tribes, who are my allies. I have made the Sacred Journey; and by the word of The Prophet, I tell you, a *roumi*, that I will not, if you do as I say, lead you into battle against the *roumi*. You——?"

Bregg's blackened lips parted; he started to speak, and stopped. Another shape had darkened the doorway; the man whom the other had before called Ibn Warana, had returned. Towards him, Bregg jerked his stubbled chin.

"And him?" he rasped thickly. "How about him? He's been standin' out behind the tent—stretchin' an ear."

A look that was almost one of anger came over the old *kaid's* face. There was a cold sharpness in his voice as he answered:

"This man is also a *Kaid* of *Kaids;* he is Ibn Warana, my nephew and my ally. He, this night, has fought with us. He will fight with us, he and his tribe, in the desert."

"And me? I'll fight for him?"

"You will fight for me, Rakil-Bauda. I have already given you my oath."

"*Bon!* O. K...." Bregg whispered it slowly, swerving his burning glance from face to face above him. "But he's a *kaid* and a big shot, too. He's your nephew. Have him give his word."

A silence came upon the three of them

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then. The only sounds were the slow sputter of the fire, the drift of sand, the low mumble of sleeping men, the faraway stamp and snort of picketed camels.

"You have heard, Ibn Warana?"

"I have heard." The thick lips lisped it slowly.

"Answer, then!"

"And I, too, Ibn Warana, give my oath: this *roumi* shall not be led in battle against any other *roumi,* but only against our enemies in the tribes of the desert."

A kind of slow and strange sighing sound came from the bound man on the floor of the tent. His tautly held body relaxed; his head fell forward on his bare and blood-caked knees. Then, very gradually, he rolled over and back, and the two who stood above, staring down, saw that he was again unconscious.

It was old Rakil-Bauda who clapped his hands for a slave to bring water, a clean cloth, and to cut the bonds. It was he also, who said as the slave deftly performed his tasks; "This one is a real man, a real warrior. I was right—from the first. Him we can well use."

But to that his nephew, Ibn Warana, made no audible answer. He had turned, and strode away, towards his own tent. And on his fat, unhealthy-looking face was a small and deeply thoughtful smile.

WITH the gray coolness of the dawn, they brought the pack camels and riding dromedaries in from the picket lines, forced them to kneel, take their loads of fighting men and loot. Beside old Rakil-Bauda, leaning heavily on an empty Lebel rifle, stood Bregg.

With narrowed eyes he stared at that scene, remembering now his words of last night, his promise to this man beside him, and also the fact that this rifle he held in his hand was empty. Very empty. It was, as old Rakil-Bauda had said, this—or slow and awful death. But now he lived, and might go on living, might win, somehow, from this cold, fierce old warrior the price of his freedom....

At his side, Rakil-Bauda spoke.

"That beast is yours. Mount, *roumi.* Today, the slave will guide. Tomorrow, you will have her to yourself."

"*Bon.* O. K." He lifted stiffly up into the wide wooden saddle on the back of the kneeling beast, watched the black slave slip deftly in before him, touch the dromedary on the neck with his short camel-stick.

Grunting, the lean and long-legged dromedary rose. Others rose about it in the last fog wisps of the dawn. Drivers beat their animals' necks, crying out sharply. The horsemen that formed the point and flank of the caravan had already trotted away over the next rise; only faintly there came back the slur of their Arabians' unshod hoofs on the sand and shale.

Ahead of him, where the old *emir* rode a stately dromedary all alone, a young, grinning slave dressed in white *abba* beat with the palm of one hand on a sheepskin drum, the blue battle banner of the Druse in slow folds above his head. That other, Ibn Warana, he could not find in the long, bobbing line. He must be ahead with the scouts and the point, he told himself.

Then, uncontrollably, Bregg grinned. For the first time, he could fully take in the amazing spectacle of this march, the lurching camels and horses, the weirdly clad riders, the drummer and his slow-floating battle banner.

"Just like a lousy circus," he grunted to himself in English. "Needs nothin' but a damn' calliope and a couple o' kids with peanuts."

Then the red, bitter sun struck over the dune rims, and day was full upon the desert. Bregg turned clumsily in the wooden saddle, and looked back. Above that high, round dune where what was left of his company lay, numberless vultures were circling down, and towards it crept jackals. His eyelids contracted slightly; his fingers lifted, to feel the company insignia on his collar tabs.

"An' you're here," he whispered. "An' alive. Same old luck still workin'—mebbe!"

They rode south all that day, and all that next week, striking through a corner of British Trans-Jordania and out into the open, burning wastes of the great Nefudh. They saw no one, not even the tracks of other men. It seemed that, solitary and

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strong, they were riding with willful foolishness into the vast and burning heart of the illimitable furnace which was the Nefudh. No one talked with Bregg, no one came near him except the mute slave who rode with him, brought him food and water during the halts. The thousand or so men of this great war party seemed to have accepted him, to have forgotten him. All except the small and fat man, Ibn Warana. That man he found staring at him, on the march, and in camp at night; and stared back, with the same sullen, distrustful, hating glance....

THEN, on the night of the ninth day, Rakil-Bauda came to the door of his tent for the first time since they had left French territory.

"It is time, *roumi,*" he said, standing straightly there. "Before long we will be at the Wells of Mekoub. And there are the tribes of the Howeina we seek—our enemies. Tomorrow," he waved his hand towards the covered piles of looted guns and ammunition, "you must show the warriors the battle secrets of the French."

Slowly Bregg nodded.

"*Bon,*" he grunted. "But, after that—if your private brawl goes all right?"

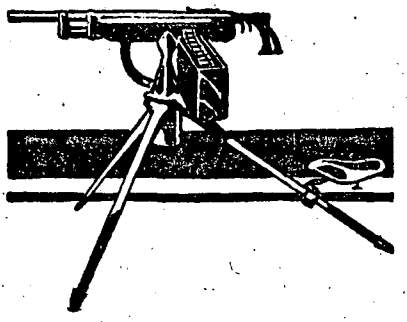
Rakil-Bauda looked down at him with level eyes.

"Kismet rules everything. I—a mortal—do not know...." He said no more, turned towards the east, and away from the low redness of the dying sun.

"Uh, huh." Bregg whispered it to himself silently. "That's all the promise you can give me, hey, guy? Well, I like you as a guy, and it's all you can say, right now... Anyhow, whatever I teach you now won't do no white man any harm. Not if I figure right. Because there ain't enough ammunition here for more than one little-bitty desert war. Hotchkisses, Chauchats an' Lebels 're nice pieces; but you got to have stuff to shoot 'em with. An' you won't have the same luck in Syria twice!"

He looked up, and spoke aloud to Rakil-Bauda: "That Kismet business means nothin' to me. But, bring your smart boys around in the morning, and I'll show 'em."

At dawn, he did, and all throughout that scorching day. While tense faced tribesmen knelt beside him in the shimmering sand, he blasted holes through rough targets with all the issue firearms of the French service. He fired prone,



from the hip, from the shoulder, on the run, and at close range, with a Lebel. He kicked goatskin targets into quivering bits with Chauchats and Hotchkiss guns, showed them frontal, transverse, enfilade and barrage machine-gun fire.

And by dusk, a hundred picked warriors, who already knew some little of white men's guns and a great deal of the art of killing, could do almost all the things he had done.

"Welled!" murmured old Rakil-Bauda into his beard, watching keenly. "That will sweep the sons of jackals from the land! They have nothing but the old Enfields and Mausers they took from the English and Turkish dead, years ago, during the *roumi* war."

"So!" It came half audibly from Ibn Warana, crouched on one knee beside the older, taller man. "But—why not kill the cursed *roumi* now? He has shown us all——"

A strange fire broke into being in Rakil-Bauda's eyes, then as swiftly died away as he looked down and broke in on Ibn Warana.

"I am *emir;* I rule here, Ibn Warana," he said in a low, but sharp voice. "That man is a fine warrior. Let him die in the battle that is to come—or not die. Rise now, and go to your tribe!"

"I rise," said the small man simply. But as he did so, under the flowing folds of his beautifully embroidered *burnous,* his right hand caught tightly about the haft of his dagger there....

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The old man stared after him, feet spread, long, strong hands on his hips.

"You are a fool," he whispered. "A great but dangerous fool, Ibn Warana. The little, leather-faced man with the voice like a crow, the *roumi,* he is worth a dozen of you. But, you are my brother's son, and your blood is my blood. Even so——"

But then he was silent, striding forward lithely across the sand towards Bregg where he stood beside a smoking, hot Hotchkiss gun and a half dozen hawk-like warriors. A brief smile came to Rakil-Bauda's face as he advanced. The little *roumi* was now smiling, was, somehow, happy.

To him, he raised his hand in a sign. Bregg strode forward through the sand, stood, sweating, staring, before him.

"Those men, they know now, *roumi?*"

"Sure, they know! Why not? You got four dozen boys there that don't waste ten rounds in fifty. You take a guy like——"

"That is good," broke in Rakil-Bauda calmly. "On the morrow there will be battle. You will ride with those men behind you. *Inch' Allah!* That is good—and is all!"

He turned then, silently, and strode back towards the tents. Bregg stared after him. Then, without his quite knowing it, he stuck out his chest and chin.

"Trust me, don't you, guy?" he muttered. "Know a soldier when you see a soldier. Well, that's me—Joe Bregg!"

He had seen many battles—in the Meuse, the Argonne, the Riff, the Atlas and Syria. But never such a one as this. And, he told himself a bit grimly, staring down from the line of dunes towards the Wells of Mekoub, he would probably never see another!

IN THE morning dark against the bright, sun-gleaming sea of the desert, the palms, fig trees and fertile soil of the great oasis below lay darkly, quietly. At first glance, there seemed to be no sign of life, or of death, in that place. But then, watching carefully, he could see the stone-lined shapes of the wells, and, nearer, the gray sprawl of the Howeina sentry's body—the one who had found them on the ridge the night before, and almost gotten back to the oasis....

No smoke from cooking fires rose above the palm fronds. The fires were out; even now, on what the Howeina considered the free side of the oasis, the women, the old men and children were loading the pack animals for their flight. Faintly, as the wind shifted a bit, he could hear the frightened bleating of many sheep, the snorting of camels, the cries of women, and of children. In a few minutes probably, their *sheikhs* would send them forth. And then——

Bregg squirmed about where he lay, tugging aside the folds of the still unfamiliar *burnous* he wore, and looked behind him. The warriors of the Druse tribes lay like great lizards upon the burning sands of the dune slope. In their hands they held their newly prized Lebels and Chauchats. Behind that line were the fighting camels, nervous, quivering, but quiet. There knelt the freshly elected Hotchkiss gunners, fingering their ammunition, their strange pieces, staring up with slit eyes at the riflemen above on the ridge. There fat little Ibn Warana sat his beautiful female dromedary, at his right side the banner-bearer, at his left, the drummer.

A sort of husky grunt came through Bregg's set lips.

"An' you wanted me t' ride one o' those long-legged plugs down in with you, huh, Fatty? Not me!" He tapped his thighs with sweaty fingertips. "These has carried me far enough now. An' will—until I've found the bullet with my name on it!"

A sudden but quiet movement at his left attracted his attention. Old Raskil-Bauda lay there. At his belt, that man carried the holstered revolver which had once belonged to a Legion *sous-lieutenant.* But in his powerful right hand was his long, curving scimitar. The gleaming point of this he had now raised high over his head.

It was the sign.

Bregg stared down at the Oasis of Mekoub. All night long the *sheikhs* of the Howeina had filtered scouts through the desert, losing scores of men, but finding out, to their alarm but full knowledge, just where the raiding Druse lay. Now, from

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the rear of the oasis, and out of what they thought was maximum rifle range, they were sending a slender, long, yet swift column: the flocks, the pack animals and spare horses, herded by the women, old men and children.

A tall old man on an overladen dromedary rode at the head, a long-barrelled musket that he held glinting in the sun's rays. That silver-mounted musket made a splendid focus for a target. The Druse snipers used it, at once. The old man let forth a high and thin yell. One hand freed from the musket, clawed up at the blue sky. He fell head-foremost from his mount.

About that trembling beast, long-range Lebel bullets kicked up small spurts of sand, to then lift, swing back, full onto their targets—the herders of that pitiful caravan.

"Aw—let 'em be!" husked Bregg. "Fight men, will ya?"

It seemed that immediately his wish was fulfilled. Broken and reeling, the caravan turned back into the temporary safety of the oasis. And at the same time, from the other side, straight out from the wells and towards the line of dunes, came the Howeina!

MAYBE even then their *sheikhs* knew that the Druse outnumbered them, held better arms. But that they did not show. They came on foot, on camels, and on fast-running, small horses with redshot eyes, out straightly across the flat, and on, up the slope of the dunes. They came all together, and in one thick, screaming, careless, blood-mad mob.

"Boy!" whispered Bregg through his teeth. "Right into these fellas' hands!"

Beside him, old Rakil-Bauda had risen fully erect, and uttered a short word of command. Up and down that line, in one quick, screaming chatter that rose swiftly to an awful chorus, the looted French pieces began their work. But Bregg did not watch that below for long; too many times had he seen its effects before. Something behind him had drawn his attention. Then he sharply yelled, spun the old *emir* hard by the shoulder, and out of the way, bawling at the other prone warriors firing there.

Up from their position behind the ridge, kicking and yowling at their already frantic beasts, surged the men of Ibn Warana's tribe. They rode pell-mell and low to their saddles, brains insanely held with the thought of battle, of what lay on the other side of that ridge—Howeina women, palm wine and loot....

A curse in the Druse dialect came from old Rakil-Bauda; he slashed with his scimitar at the forelegs of the first dromedary that thundered past him. But then, rapidly, he turned, and ran for safety, as

the others on the ridge had. For, despite all orders, despite all prearranged battle logic, *Kaid* Ibn Warana was leading the shock troops of the reserve in a mad, spear-like charge down that exposed slope!

Below, the Howeina, set back by that first awful fire, saw and understood, screamed, and came streaming on. At the foot of the slope those two lines met, terribly! Beast lunged beast, kicking, biting. Brown, half-naked madmen clawed and thrust at one another with scimitars and daggers in the chaotic tangle of the beasts.

And Bregg, standing there on the slope, the loaded Lebel heavy in his hand, saw that Ibn Warana, who had led that attack, now lay back from it, and to one side—far to one side....

"The dog!" Bregg muttered it not quite understanding yet. Then he saw old Rakil-Bauda's face. It was white and set in an awful frenzy. Far on the other side of the oasis, the Howeina caravan of flocks, furniture and camp-followers was moving swiftly off into the desert. And, on the slope below, Howeina and snarling Druse fought on equal terms. No man could

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safely fire into that mêlée; it was impossible.

"Come—*roumi!*" The old *emir* stared at him with eyes that hardly focussed. "It is for us to end this. Ibna Warana, he has——" His voice died away and he lifted up into his free hand the French revolver from his belt.

"Yeah, he has, all right!" Bregg was stooped, transferring from a Lebel at his feet a bayonet to his own piece. *"On les aura!* We'll get 'em! Let's go!"

They went, running swiftly and silently, the little, bandy-legged man straining pace for pace with Rakil-Bauda. There were Howeina to meet them—many of them, who had seen their rush down the slope and had broken loose for just this purpose.

"Allah! Allah, l'ill' Allah Akhbar!" It was a great cry that rose up from Rakil-Bauda's throat. "They are mine—mine!"

The scimitar sang around his head; he battered and clubbed with the revolver butt, disdaining its loaded chambers. At his shoulder Bregg crouched, fresh blood on his face and hands, the bayoneted rifle sure and deadly in his grip. Howeina ringed them in; fell twisting and yelling before them, to let others come madly forward in their places. Into that pack, fully aware of one another, fighting alone yet superbly together, Bregg and Rakil-Bauda stabbed, hewed, hacked.

Then, suddenly, for Bregg it was all over. His bayonet point caught on a breastbone as a bearded warrior fell screaming away from his attack. Cursing, the little man tensed forward, to tug the point clear. His worn and cracked Legion *brodequin* slid on a bare and bloody chest. He went down, heavily.

He thrashed out, blindly, fending off bare legs and feet from his body. Then a strong hand, the hand of Rakil-Bauda, had him by the nape of his headcloth, was dragging him out, and free. He stood, staggering. A bearded man with mad eyes lunged with an upraised and clubbed musket at the tall Druse.

Bregg shouted, ducked, struck in as he went. His blow caught home, his shoulder taking part of that terrific musket swipe. But slowly, he tottered back and up from the fallen warrior, raised clumsy fingers to his forehead, then dropped forward, silently....

IT WAS into the face of the young slave who had taken care of him since he had been with the tribes that Bregg stared as his senses slowly returned. The slave was trembling; his flat face twitched with fear. Bregg, sitting up, cursed the man.

"Where's Rakil-Bauda? Where's the *emir,* you?"

A hoarse stream of monosyllables came from the slave, and he gaped around him where they lay on the ridge, from where the battle had started.

"Dead, *roumi,*" he replied. "Killed—right after he had pulled you out from there."

"Who killed him? How?"

Stupid with his fear, the slave shook his head in silence. Near Bregg lay a discarded scimitar. He crawled to it, dragging his wounded leg after him.

"Now tell me," he suggested, fingering the thing.

"But you saw before!" blurted the slave. "And you can see now. Look!"

Mounds of dead and dying heaped the plain between the slope and oasis. Winrows of dead, Howeina and Druse, streaked towards the oasis itself. But that place was silent. It was far out in the desert, where that caravan had gone, that men fought singly or in small groups. Bregg stared with hard, searching eyes at the man by his side.

"Ibn Warana, huh?" he croaked. "I thought so... Bumped the old boy off, killed him from behind, didn't he? That's why he ran that mob of his down the slope without waiting. That's why—— Who're those fellows they've got out there now?"

For just a moment the slave's distended eyes blinked out over the desert.

"They are not Howeina," he said in a cracked whisper. "They are Druse—they are those who were close to Rakil-Bauda, who... It is too late to talk of things now. Warana has got the power he sought. He has won this battle, in his way. Not Rakil-Bauda. That one is dead. And soon... Go if you can, *roumi!* Go!"

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The young slave was on his feet now. He was shivering all over.

"This has been planned a long time, *roumi,*" he whispered, staring off into the desert where blood-crazy men still shouted and shot. "Rakil-Bauda did not know it, and you did not know it. Me—I did not speak; I did not dare. I am a slave, and Rakil-Bauda would have cut my tongue out for a liar. That is all."

The slave shuffled uncertainly for a broken second in the sand, then bolted down the slope towards the picket line. Bregg glanced grimly after him.

"All right for you, Bright Eyes. But I only got one peg to jump on. What you say is so, I guess. But I can't walk, nor ride, nor nothin'. So——"

He was silent, watching the frantic slave. That man had cast loose the tethering rope of a small, swift fighting-dromedary, was hurling himself into the saddle. Then, from a hollow in the sand, a warrior of Ibn Warana's tribe rose up, a Lebel in his hands, and shouted something rapid and guttural in Druse. The slave did not answer; he kicked at the beast with bare feet. The warrior fired three times with the Lebel, the last shot at the already prostrate black figure on the sand. Then, slowly, he came up towards Bregg. He did not speak. He just tapped the hot barrel of the Lebel, nodded down the slope towards the dead slave, and then drew back his lips from tusk teeth in what Bregg knew was not meant for a smile.

"O. K.," Bregg muttered in English. "I get all this, smooth enough! There's just a couple o' things I don't savvy yet. But, my friend Fatty is comin', and I guess he'll straighten it out."

THE battle had come to an end now. The last of the fighting, butchery and looting was over. Back towards the slope, herding the laden camels and what was left of the Howeina before them, came Ibn Warana and the warriors of the Druse. Ahead of Ibn Warana the naked black drummer ran, beating his instrument, singing, shouting, dancing, and to Bregg on the slope drifted the hoarse, almost insane victory chant.

"All rosy for Warana, now, huh? Those guys have forgot already that the fine old boy is dead, murdered by his fat nephew. But that don't matter to these boys. They're like jackals. All of 'em—except the old fella. An' he's done in. Like I'll be...."

His gaze slowly, craftily swung to the face of the sentry beside him. But that man was watching him as a falcon might watch a wounded crow. Bregg looked away. There was no chance. He was lame from the flesh wound in his leg. He was unarmed, for he had tossed aside the scimitar he had used to frighten the slave. Now, he knew, there were just two things left to him: death, clean and swift, or the other kind! He no longer thought of what he had called his old soldier's luck; the thing had seemingly long ago deserted him. Even this man beside him would not cleanly or quickly kill him if he tried to get away.

He waited, crouched there, cleaning and dressing the deep flesh wound in his leg as best he might. When he looked down the slope once more, the wild horde of men and beasts was almost up to him. The black drummer was froth-lipped and rigid with his frenzy of victory; suddenly he went into a convulsion, kneeling over sidewise as he danced.

Ibn Warana looked at the man coldly, pointed with the tip of his scimitar blade. The fellow was rolled and shoved aside. Another took his place. Then the fat, small man who led this horde saw Bregg above him on the slope, and he laughed harshly, vaulting down from his dromedary.

Bregg sat still, watching him, knowing there was nothing else he could do—now. Before him Ibn Warana stopped, tiny, booted feet spread, one hand on his hip, the other holding the camel-stick which had replaced the scimitar. He called out a guttural and laughing command. Blood-smeared Druse warriors, who still clasped

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their loot in their arms, staggered forward, to form a close and silent ring about the two.

"The *roumi!*" Ibn Warana pointed with the camel-stick. "He awaits Kismet. *I* am Kismet!" He laughed again, and, reaching in, struck Bregg sharply across his unprotected face with the camel-stick. "Answer me—filth! Is it not so?"

Rage roared hotly in Bregg's brain. At least, he could tell this man, tell the others, before he died....

"You," he said slowly and clearly, using all the Druse dialect he knew so that the others might also understand, "are a murderer and a yellow dog! You broke your word—as a warrior—to your uncle. Then you had him killed. These others here, you satisfied them with loot. Yeah—for now. Your uncle, the *emir,* wanted peace, after this war was over, after he had squared his blood feud with these guys, the Howeina. You——!"

HE GATHERED all the spittle he had in his dry mouth, and jetted it broadly onto Ibn Warana's tiny, embossed Moroccan-leather boots. Ibn Warana's lips parted, a kind of sighed curse came through them. But he did not jerk loose the scimitar at his belt, and, strangely, he laughed.

"The *roumi* has spoken," he said swiftly, talking to the tribe. "The filth has made filth with his mouth. Thinking that I will kill him—easily—now." Ibn Warana stopped his rapid flow of words, to let forth a cackle of high, quick laughter. "But, he is wrong. I will not. I will keep him. I will beat him, and play with him as a toy. And then, when we have come against the *roumi,* against the French, when all the tribes of the desert are ready for the Holy War, I shall cut his tongue from his lips for this—cut his hands from his arms—burn out his eyes. Then send him to them as a sign of our coming. Now he has spat on my feet. Bare his feet! I have this for them—this!"

Bregg had tried to stagger erect, tried to strike. But, from behind, they got him, held him. And he tensed silently, stiffly, while the camel-stick blows cut his face and eyes, while they tore away his cracked Legion *brodequins,* while Ibn Warana, a froth of blood on his lips, slashed at the bare soles of his feet....

Bregg fainted then; swiftly slid into a deep, cool abyss of unconsciousness. During the next few days he fainted many times again. For during those days, almost constantly while he remained in possession of his senses, Ibn Warana, the man who had made himself, through stealth, craft and murder, *emir* of this tremendous fighting party, beat and tortured him.

He kept him near his own tent, under the charge of slaves, as he would a hound, or a trained falcon. On him he practised all the immense cruelty that his semi-insane, savage nature could devise. From day to day, the forms of cruelty changed, and sometimes, he allowed the Howeina women of his newly formed harem to play with the *roumi* also, fling filth at him, roll him in the mud, in the dying embers of a fire. But, daily, he himself beat the bare, blood-caked soles of Bregg's feet with a camel-stick. That was his own devising, his own task and delight.

Many tribes had joined the Druse now; emissaries had gone far south, even to El Houl and Kalaat el Muadhdham, telling of that crushing defeat of the Howeina, the death of that man Rakil-Bauda, the rise of Ibn Warana, and the advent of the new Holy War against the French *roumi.* Every day, new *sheikhs* and their fighting men rode in to join the tremendous party, came stiffly to the door of Ibn Warana's tent.

With them Ibn Warana bowed, and touched hands. Together, they ate lamb, floating in rich butter sauce and rice, sucked coffee from cups the size of thimbles. Then Ibn Warana would wipe his hands on the *abbas* of his slaves, and lead his new guests and allies forth, to show them his new prize, the *roumi* who crawled on his knees like a dog....

While they stood stoically and silent, he would beat Bregg, roll him in the mire of the camp, reopen the old and festering cuts on the white man's back and sides. Then at last, tiring, he would toss the shattered camel-stick away:

"You see? This—once it was a *roumi* soldier. Yes, in our last raid on the French,

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we got him. They are all like that. And, after this is over, there will be many more!"

SPRAWLING, half-conscious and almost half-dead, Bregg only stared at him out of blood-clotted eyes. Pain, sharp, live pain, did not come to him any more now. He was far beyond that. About what senses and feelings he had left his body had automatically built a great wall of numbness through which nothing any man would inflict could penetrate.

He was part mad; that he knew. Yet, one corner of his brain was still calm, steady, sane; it thought on, purposefully, sharply. It had one ambition—to somehow, some day, kill this man, Ibn Warana. All hope of his own recovery he had long before given up. Vengeance—his claw-like hands tight about Ibn Warana's fat, convulsive throat! And then he, Joe Bregg, would die happy!

But, so far, that chance had not come to him. And as the slow, awful days moved on, and the great *rezzia* struck west and north, towards French Syria, he knew that it would not. Somehow, he realized, Ibn Warana knew. The man would never come near enough to him to let him get his hands about that throat. Never....

Ibn Warana was mad—far madder than the agony of life had made Joe Bregg. But, in that madness was a shrewd flow of thought, as there had been that day at the Wells of Mekoub, when he had led that seemingly insane charge down the slopes at the Howeina. On the surface it sounded beyond reason to any warrior who had ever really fought the French to think that any desert tribes, however strong or well armed, could smash the colonial troops protecting Syria. It was impossible. And Ibn Warana must know that.

Slowly, but yet with great clarity, the thought evolved itself in Joe Bregg's reeling brain: Ibn Warana did not intend to fight the French. No. He intended that the tribes who had marched with him to fight the French should embroil themselves in what was so easily termed a Holy War. Then he, Ibn Warana, as he had at the Wells of Mekoub, would turn swiftly back and with a few picked men race into the desert to the south, and raid the unprotected villages of the warriors whom he had lured into Syria. And then Ibn Warana would be gone—anywhere, but forever.

"You'll do it," croaked Joe Bregg aloud, reeling in his bonds on the back of a staggering pack camel. "You'll hand 'em the double-cross. Raid a *poste;* get these boys stuck with the Legion on their tail—then blow, yerself.... Mebbe!" He tried to laugh; the sound was a cracked whisper. "I ain't dead yet—not quite!"

Then he moaned with pain, for the Howeina slave who led his camel had abruptly jerked it to a stop at a barked order from ahead. Camels, dromedaries, horses and men remained motionless in the shimmering haze of the noon desert. Hoofs clattered on shale, and ahead, peering painfully, Joe Bregg could see a sweat-stained Druse rider nudging his horse towards Ibn Warana.

Then a great, hoarse shout came down the line. Men and beasts started forward. Careening high on his cruel perch on the bare saddle, Joe Bregg tried to figure it out. Finally, that, too, came to him: they were crossing the line into French territory. The Holy War was begun....

With eyes that blinked and barely saw, Bregg stared at the country they passed through. His company had served along the border here, after Mousseifre. He knew this place—or should....

He did, he told himself numbly. They were even now on the top of the low, desolate range of hills that stretched west to the huge *poste* of the Legion at Laminiyeh. Something like fifteen kilometres to there. Nothing for a gang like this—who fought in the darkness, and always attacked at dawn.

Bregg's head sank forward on his filthy, bare chest. When the Howeina slave who led his camel stared up at him it seemed that the mad *roumi* captive was either asleep or in a coma. The Howeina's slant eyes narrowed; if this man died before they got to the end of this day's journey, he himself would die, and terribly. He knew that well; Ibn Warana had personally told him so, with blows of the camel-stick.

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Nervous sweat broke out on the slave. He gaped ahead, where the *emir* rode beside the covered litters of his harem. He yelled to another slave to take his lead-rope, raced ahead, panting, trying to frame the words in his mind.

But the *emir* only stared at him coldly and struck him once with his stick, cursed him, and said that the tribes were going to camp right here until night anyhow. The *roumi* was to be brought then to Ibn Warana's tent....

FOUR slaves carried Bregg there, laid him hunched and stiff, as though dead, before the *emir*. That man sat with the *kaids* and *sheikhs* of the other tribes. They were in feast before battle. Slaves held huge platters of goat meat and rice, sweet, thick coffee. At one side, a gray-bearded Howeina slave toiled clumsily at opening small tins of food — French issue rations that had been taken from the packs of Bregg's company, weeks before.

Ibn Warana scowled at the man, wiping greasy fingers across his greasy beard.

"You can open the *roumi* food, Howeina?" His fingers lowered from his beard to his dagger hilt as he asked it. In answer, the Howeina ripped the tops from two beef tins, rushed forward, to kneel prostrate with them outlined in his hands. A smile took the place of the scowl on Ibn Warana's face. With his fingertips, he pried the compressed beef out.

"*Roumi* food," he grunted to the staring warriors about him. "After tonight, there will be much more like it!"

The words seemed to have aroused another thought in his mind, for he rose with what was swiftness for him, and heavily kicked the prone figure of Bregg. The white man lay utterly still. A curse came from the Druse. His dagger slid into his hand. With its point, he jabbed sharply at Bregg's shoulder.

The white man moaned aloud; his eyes opened, and he sat up reeling. He looked with vacant eyes at Ibn Warana, his blackened mouth slack and loose. Beneath the chin, the Druse fondled the dagger point.

"Tonight, *roumi*," he said, "an hour after the sun is gone, you will no longer have those things—the eyes, the tongue, the hands. I will take them from you. And then I will send you forth, as I have promised you, as my greeting and warning to the other filth... You will like it—that jest? Answer me!"

Joe Bregg's eyes only gave a vague stare; his head rolled on his shoulders loosely. A curse came from Ibn Warana. Stepping back a pace, he heavily kicked the white man in the stomach. Bregg winced, falling back, rolled like a log, then staggered erect, mumbling and laughing.

"He is mad, your toy," said one of the *kaids* in the ring behind Ibn Warana. "His brain has gone; once I had one of the Beni Ageyl like that. But, he died on me. This one—he is funnier. Watch, *Emir!*"

Bregg's vapid eyes had brightened a bit; his gaze was fixed on the shining tops of the French beef tins, where the hurried slave had dropped them. A sort of animal shout came from his throat. Raggedly, staggering, sometimes falling, the ring of warriors laughing at him, he toiled towards those bright tin tops.

With little, clucking noises of childish joy, he took them into his hands. He held them, so that the fierce desert sun caught on their surfaces. One he threw away, as if some quirk of his muddled mind refused it. But the other he held, sitting with it tight in one filthy palm, shining mirror-like into his own eyes, the eyes of the amused and grunting warriors.

Then, as though tired of that, he shifted the plane of the thing, so that the sun struck with all its power full down upon it, and a dance of light went up into the sky, stopping as he lowered the position of his hands, then beginning as he again raised it. As he did so, he mumbled and laughed, clucked his tongue, rolled his bloodshot eyes.

It was Ibn Warana who tired of it first.

"Come," he said irritably, "we will have our real pleasure from that filth later. Let us go and see to the camels. You"—he fixed

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his beady eyes on the cringing Howeina slave—"do not let him move from where he now is until I get back!"

He stared at Bregg as he and the other chieftains moved forward, but Bregg still laughed and cooed thickly over the shining tin top, and at the swift, almost even refractions of its rays into the sky....

For three hours, until the coming of dusk, the white man kept it up. His aching brain throbbed; his innumerable wounds and bruises shot pain that was awful fire all through his body. But still he repeated that crude heliograph message; repeated it, repeated it:

Bregg, 19087, Company 7. Druse 12 kilos west. Attack by dusk. By dusk.

How many times he sent forth that message he never knew. At last his lamed hands could not hold the tin top any more. He dropped it, staring with hazed eyes off towards that blue, diminishing range of hills to the west and towards Laminiyeh *Poste.* There was no answer, no way of sending an answer. Even if the Legion at Laminiyeh had seen. Whether or not they had seen, he did not know; probably would never know. Perhaps they had abandoned the *Poste;* perhaps they no longer had a heliograph tower and a man on watch for messages from the desert.

Those things—they were all part of an old soldier's fortune. Or, they were not. Bregg's head sank forward on his knees. He dropped into a sort of stupor that was not wakefulness and yet was not sleep.

THE swift dusk of the desert fell like an immense purple curtain across the horizon to the west. The hills were blotted from sight, the desert itself was swallowed in shadow. Only the dim shapes of the tents stood out, the lines of picketed camels, the figures of warriors, preparing and trying their arms for battle.

Then a familiar, lisping voice spoke behind him, and the dozing Howeina slave sprang up. Ibn Warana and his party of chieftains were there. Bregg's time had come. Now was the end, he whispered slowly, silently. After this there would be——

A startled cry came from the slave, bearing forth from Ibn Warana's tent the long scimitar. His dark eyes changed color as he stared up at the night sky. The others stared also, muttering curses and strange prayers and promises to Allah.

There was above them in that metal-black expanse of the still starless sky, a deep, wild wailing noise. Nothing could be seen: nothing but slim, long fingers of red flame and smoke. The warriors stood hunched stiffly with fear and wonder. All of them—even Ibn Warana, were from the desert. Never had they heard or seen any thing like this before.

Joe Bregg was the only one who understood and moved. As the first machine-gun bursts of that downsweeping French fighting plane tore at the ground, he scrambled doglike forward on his hands and knees, and tore the long scimitar from the slave's loose grasp.

He did not use that, though. He had no time or opportunity then. The fighting ship was low now, pancaking out of its terrific power-drive, raking the ground with burst after burst of machine-gun fire; and other planes, Breguet bombers and single-seat fighters, were close on its tail, already in action....

Green-lashing tracer bullets cracked down among the Druse in those first terrific bursts. Men in the tight, numbed group spun, fell, crawled, or lay very still. Through those huddled, stiff bodies, on his hands and knees, crawling like a dog, Bregg went.

He passed from figure to figure, the scimitar out before him. Then he dropped the long, beautiful weapon, reared up almost erect, to lunge, hands tensing for the throat of Ibn Warana, lying motionless but unwounded in the darkness right ahead. With his gaunt hands about that hated neck, he choked it—choked—choked....

IT WAS perhaps an hour or so before dawn, when the Legion outfit from Laminiyeh came slowly in through the great, smoking holes in the ground, the

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wrecked tents and the awful carnage, that Joe Bregg was found. The captain of the Legion company from Laminiyeh was methodical; he wished to actually check up to the last man the effects of that aerial *strafe* and barrage.

One by one, he had the piles of dead unearthed and sorted. Almost all of those forms were still, stiff. But one kicked and moved feebly, croaking out words that sounded vaguely like English. Into the eyes of that man, his service revolver ready in his other hand, the Legion Captain flashed his electric torch. The voice of the man so exposed became, more distinct:

"Turn off your *sacre vache* light, will ya? I'm Bregg—Joe Bregg—19807, Company Seven. *Compagnie de Marche; oui!*"

The captain found difficulty in pronouncing his words. But he pointed with the end of his electric torch to the corpse that had lain right on top of the American.

"Lucky for you, my old one," he said hoarsly, "that this fat one was right on top of you. He is a hash, from aerial bullets."

Joe Bregg looked too at the riddled body of Ibn Warana, and at the blue-black marks about the fat throat, where his own hands had clamped so fiercely for so many long hours. He shook his head, and, what might have been for another man a smile, passed over his face.

"No, that ain't luck. That—that's just Kismet, *mon capitaine!*"

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The Far North Aleutian Islands Are No Place to Be if You Think You're Licked

THE BETTER MAN

By RALPH R. PERRY

Author of "Squared," "The Fo'c'sle Stiff," etc.

RAIN pattered on "Bull" Jennifer's oilskin. From black, sodden spruce trees that overhung the creek rain dripped in great globules that spattered into the gold pan he held. A gray mist of spray danced above the residue of black sand, flecked with grains and nodules of yellow gold.

The creek was close to the shore of Bering Sea. Through the gap in the trees Bull saw leaden gray water pitted by the rain, and gray, weeping clouds that crawled perpetually down from the north upon the Aleutian Islands. Yesterday it had rained, and the day before, and the week before. Tomorrow it would rain, and next week, and next month. The rain would fall two hundred and fifty days out of the year. The drip, drip, drip of water was perpetual. The sound beat like a pulse in Jennifer's head.

His hands were shaking. Now why was that? He had only found a pocket of gravel caught in a natural riffle in the creek bed. This was the last pan. He had about three pounds of dust. Five hundred dollars' worth. Nothing to give an old-timer gold fever.

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He was strong. Those shaking fingers of his could have crumpled the gold pan like cardboard; the bent back was broad as a door. Many believed he was the strongest man in the Islands. Others gave the palm to Zarnov, the Russian fur poacher, who could bend a dime between thick, squat fingers. But Jennifer could grip a horseshoe and bring the ends together as slow and evenly as though his huge hands were a vise. What *was* the matter? He could hardly spoon the gold from the pan.

Drip—drip—drip! Drops of water splashing from the trees, from the brim of his sou'wester, from the rim of the gold pan, from everything. Hundreds, millions, billions of drops, and yet to Bull it seemed that he heard each one fall. The rain did not murmur. It spoke, with a million separate, individual tongues.

Suddenly, violently, he hurled the gold pan into the sodden thicket.

"Damn you all, get done!" he snarled. "Damn you, get done and shut up!"

As far as Bull knew he was alone. He was talking to the rain.

The sound of his own voice was enough to bring him back to sanity. He rose, yellow haired, yellow bearded, in perfect health, strong as a bull pine, and—done up. His nerves had cracked. Only for a second, but since they had broken once, they would break again, and break more badly. Now that he had begun to hear each drop fall, he would hear nothing else. Millions of drops, falling endlessly, day and night, today, tomorrow, and the day after for two hundred and fifty days in the year—the long rainy season of the Aleutians.

There would be just one end to that.

The North, which is mercilessly kind, had given him a warning which he would be a fool to disregard.

Bull was an old-timer who knew what too much solitude can do to the strongest nerves. The mere fact that he had lost his grip momentarily did not alarm him unduly. He had an obsession. The obsession would strengthen until it mastered him. That was that. To fight against it, as a chechacko might do, because the obsession was ridiculous, would be as futile as to attempt to hold back a rising tide. The thing to do was to go south and soak himself in sunshine. The gold would pay his passage and expenses. He was all right.

He drew a long breath and faced the weeping gray clouds that crawled in from the Bering Sea.

"Nope, you don't get me!" he said aloud, coolly and sanely. "You can have my tent and gear and the gold that may be in this creek and anything else I've got till I come back. To hell with them. I'm on my way—hear me?"

Drip—drip—drip! The rain spoke with a million wordless tongues, but through the myriad of sounds, each distinct to his overwrought senses, there drifted the ghost of a voice that seemed to call, "Bull! Bull!"

But Jennifer, with his nerves under control, only laughed. He hadn't gotten to the place where he was hearing things that didn't exist—not by a long shot. Some settler skirting the coast was hailing his camp, and would offer him a quicker passage to Dutch Harbor than he could make in his own leaky boat. He stuffed the gold poke under his oilskin and strode to the mouth of the creek to take advantage of the opportunity. The North does not give its warnings often, nor too soon.

KELP HARVEY had begun to yell for Jennifer long before he expected to be heard. He was in a fever of impatience. He needed the big bearded man badly, and yet in his mind the pressing need faded before a vision: Zarnov and Jennifer facing one another with doubled fists, a fight to a finish between the two strong men of the Aleutians which would settle forever which was the better man, a fight that would be without rules and rounds, and almost without witnesses except for Kelp himself.

"Kelp" Harvey was an old man, scrawny and withered, as loud mouthed and mischievous as a blue jay. *That* would be a fight to see—and what a story he would have to tell. Nobody would complain he talked too much any more. Instead, whenever he went to Dutch Harbor, men would hunt him up.

"Say, Kelp, you saw that scrap, you lucky old wolverene," they would begin. "We've been arguing just how Zarnov could get up after that second knockdown. Can you tell us. . . ."

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The old man's beady black eyes snapped in anticipation. He'd tell them! He'd be almost as much the hero of that fight as the winner, and properly so, for it would be his doing. Already he had risked his scrawny neck to bring it about, and driven his motorboat along the coast for twenty miles to bring the principals together. He was half sick with the fear that Bull might be hunting, or out of reach, and the sight of the big yellow bearded man on the shore made Kelp yell shrilly with relief. At reckless speed he drove his boat to the shore.

"Jump aboard, Bull!" he shouted. "Zarnov's stopped at your old fur farm and robbed your pardner! But the Russky can't get away! I swam out and fouled his propeller with rope—wire rope. I'll get you back in time to knock his block off and get the furs he stole from Stove Lid!"

"Hm-m," said Bull mildly. "Ain't you a mite inaccurate? First off, 'Stove Lid' Wemyss ain't my pardner. I took pity on the no-count little runt and told him he could run my fox farm and use my motorboat and keep anything he made. Pardners don't take everything. They divvy.

"Second, Stove Lid ain't got any furs. He ain't a trapper, nor he ain't got a license to trap. Third, the foxes are mine—all eighteen of the mangy critters, and right now, considering the rain and all, Zarnov's as welcome to 'em as Stove Lid was."

"What's the rain got to do with it?"

"Why, I'm sick of it," Bull grinned. "I'm going south and get sunburned. Sunburned black as a Siwash. If me and Zarnov have a fight, somebody's going to get hurt. Couple of months in hospital, or jail, would make me miss too many boats."

"You scared of him? You admit he's the better man?"

"Not that I know of," said Bull tranquilly. "I just got something else on my mind. If you are so all fired anxious to keep Stove Lid from being robbed of something he never had, take me to Dutch Harbor. While you're there, you can tell 'Barehead' Nelson, that commands the Coastguard cutter, all about it. He's said to be heading this way to pick up some fool that was chechacko enough to shoot fur seals at sea."

"I ain't calling in no John Law," Kelp snapped viciously. His vision of a fight between the two strongest men in the Aleutians was fading, but his need of Jennifer remained as great as ever. He tried another tack.

"Bull, you're acting damn funny," he complained. "Maybe I was hasty. Stove Lid ain't your pardner, and he didn't have nothing. All right. The point is that now Zarnov's took what you gave him, he ain't got nothing. That ain't his hard luck only. It's his wife's, and his kids'."

Bull seemed to be listening to something far away.

"Stove Lid come to me about two weeks ago with a letter he'd got from his wife," Kelp went on. "He was damn near crying." The old man spat to show his contempt of such unmanly weakness. "She wrote she was sick and had lost her job. She couldn't feed the kids, which was two and four years old. Unless Stove Lid could come back or sent her some jack, all she could see to do, she wrote, was to sneak the kids into some orphan asylum. They'd get grub and clothes then. She figured she could lie about being their mother. Or—well, she hinted they mightn't have no mother. It was a right desperate letter, Bull."

"Why didn't you come after me then?"

"What for? You was broke as me. Anyhow, I fixed Stove Lid up," Kelp bragged. "He sat there, getting ready to cry because he hadn't no jack nor no way to get none. 'Snap out of it,' I says. ' 'Low if I was in your fix I'd do something besides blubber,' I says. And Stove Lid, that ain't really got no more courage than a jackrabbit, jumps up.

" 'I will!' he says, gasping like. 'Damn you I will—something you ain't looking for!' Which he must have done, too," the old man continued earnestly, "for the next time I seen him was when he ran into my cabin again, whining he'd got what he needed, but Zarnov had come by and robbed him. He's lost *plenty*, Bull, and he needs it bad. I don't dast face Zarnov my-

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self, man to man. Come on—jump aboard."

Jennifer nodded, but he did not move. He continued to stare out over the rain pocked sea, his face so tense that Kelp noticed it.

"What the devil are you listening to?" the old man demanded in bewilderment.

"Me? Nothing. Just wondering how strong I really am," said Bull. He waded down the beach and vaulted aboard the motorboat. "Give her the gas!" he commanded.

"How strong? You're bigger than Zarnov—taller, that is!" Kelp exploded.

"Him? Oh, yeah," Bull agreed. "There's limits, though. Did you ever hear every drop of rain that fell? Millions of them, all distinct. Too many to count, and yet you had to try to count them?"

"Are you crazy?"

"What's the difference if I am?" Bull demanded. "A woman that's got to watch a couple of kids going hungry must be crazy, too. I can hold out a while. I'm big enough."

KELP'S motorboat raced along a coast from which the spruces rose darkly behind the gray veil of the persistent rain. Bull sat in the forward cabin with his tremendous shoulders hunched and his huge hands pressed over his ears. For his preoccupation Kelp was glad—very glad. On account of it Bull did not notice that the launch was being followed—that two miles astern in the grayness the revenue cutter *Reindeer* steamed in their wake. Kelp had seen, and for once he was perfectly silent, sitting with compressed lips and getting every atom of speed he could extract from his motor.

On the long race up the coast he lost fully a mile, and when he arrived at the inlet on which Bull had established a fur farm of blue foxes the previous year, the old man steered for a cabin cruiser stranded on the shore at a speed which took more account of seconds gained than the possibility of damage to his boat. At the last instant he threw his boat into reverse, churning up the water as he slid alongside the cruiser, which Bull recognized as Zarnov's.

The fouling of the propeller had been a very thorough job. Zarnov had been compelled to back his cruiser against the shore at high tide and secure the stern to a tree at a spot where a ledge of rock sloped into deep water. Now that the tide was out the propeller was exposed, and the Russian himself had been busy with a hacksaw cutting through the tangle of wire that was twined around the blades.

Despite Kelp's swift approach, however, Zarnov was able to get back on deck, and, as Kelp's launch came alongside, the big Russian leaned over the rail with a Winchester.

"Give us Stove Lid's furs!" the old man yelped shrilly.

In Zarnov there was Tartar blood. His eyes were slant, his skin yellow and a few scattered, stiff black hairs seemed to be stuck in a chin that rose directly out of a huge round chest. That barrel-like body looked fat, which it was not; Zarnov seemed sluggish, and half asleep, which was equally far from the fact. He lifted the Winchester, which appeared fragile as a pipestem in contrast to his short, thick arms.

"No!" Zarnov pronounced, answering the demand and threat by a single word.

"Go on, Bull—he won't shoot!" shrilled the old man.

Zarnov smiled sleepily. The rifle swung to his shoulder and was discharged. A round hole appeared in the pane of glass over Jennifer's head; the bullet, which missed him by less than a foot, ripped through the wooden partition behind him. Bull brushed the particles of glass out of his wet beard.

"No, he won't shoot!" he grinned sarcastically. "Back her off, Kelp. I'm beginning to think Stove Lid found something worth having."

Kelp had already thrown his engine into reverse. The boat jumped away from the shore like something frightened.

"The damn murdering Bolshie!" Kelp snarled.

"Naw, he meant to miss," said Bull placidly. "Guess I'm as good a shot. Pass me the rifle."

Kelp looked alarmed. "I ain't told you, but Barehead Nelson's been following us in the *Reindeer*," he stammered. "I don't

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dast get into a shooting scrape with him right astern."

"Who's going to shoot anybody, you bloodthirsty old wolverene?" Bull grinned. "I just want to make a few bullets whistle in Zarnov's ear in case he tries to clear his propeller."

The old man swallowed the lump in his scrawny throat. "No, Bull," he said stiffly. "Don't you savvy? Them furs of Stove Lid's are seal. He shot them at sea—from your boat."

In the sudden silence between the two men the patter of rain on the superstructure was loud. "It's a long jail sentence," said Kelp miserably. "That's why I didn't tell you, Bull. I was afraid you wouldn't come, or have nothing to do with it. But you ain't nowise guilty. I kin prove that! Stove Lid had to do something—and what else could I tell him to do?"

"Yeah, he had to do something," Bull agreed. "The poor damn weak little shrimp! I didn't believe even the love of a wife and a couple of kids would give him that much guts. How far is Barehead behind?"

"A mile," groaned Kelp. "I thought you could knock Zarnov kicking and we'd be able to sink the fur in the inlet."

"Your ideas are *plumb* inaccurate. Don't have no more of them," said Bull placidly. "Swing your boat alongside Zarnov's."

"It's too late to do nothing—now," snapped the old man.

WITHOUT answering, however, Bull crawled from the cabin onto the forward deck. As the two boats drew together he slipped off his oilskin and his coat and rolled up the sleeves of his blue flannel shirt. Zarnov leveled the Winchester. Bull stared coolly down the barrel.

"Throw it away, Russky," he remarked. "Barehead's right around the point. You're caught cool. Accessory, disposing of stolen fur. Jail. Savvy?"

"You lie!" Zarnov spit out.

"You'll learn different in a minute. He'd see us sink the fur through his glasses or follow our trail into the woods, he's that close. You like jail? Saw wood all the time, in the rain?"

The slanted eyes hardened. "No," growled the Russian.

"Nor me. Specially the rain," Bull whispered into his yellow beard. "Stove Lid is my pardner," he added aloud, smiling at the lie. "I don't want my pardner to go to jail. All right. We fight. The loser takes all the blame."

"No savvy," growled the Russian craftily.

"Throw the sealskins on the beach. If you lick me, you can tell Barehead I was trying to sell them to you, but you wouldn't take them. I'll admit I shot them myself," Bull explained. "If I lick you, you say you shot seals and were trying to get rid of them. The man that's licked loses his boat and serves the sentence."

"Bull!" yelped Kelp protestingly.

"Shut up! You don't savvy the half of it," the big man remarked firmly.

"I say, I shot seals at sea?" The Russian hesitated. "All right," he growled at last. "I fight."

He laid the rifle down and stepped into the cabin, while Bull vaulted the rail and took his position at one end of the tiny afterdeck. Out of the door shot a bale of greasy sealskins, to roll over and over on the beach. Zarnov did not wait to remove his coat. Like a squat Siberian bear he waddled slowly from the cabin, chin withdrawn into his gigantic chest, the fingers that could bend a dime half open. He meant to wrestle, and Bull, who would have preferred to fight, had no room for footwork. He struck, but Zarnov took the punch on a shoulder as he rushed in, head lowered. Then he had Bull in his grip, both arms around the taller man's waist.

Kelp cried out. The Russian, with the under grip, was trying to break Bull's back. The yellow head swayed back an inch, two inches—but no more. Beneath Zarnov's coat the muscles gathered and bunched like those on the haunches of a horse that pulls against an immovable weight. Slowly Bull thrust one hand between his stomach and

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that of his adversary, and thrust the other beneath the Russian's chin to force the bullet head back.

The interlocked bodies scarcely moved. Weaker men would have swayed and wrestled from side to side of the narrow deck; here the force exerted was too great, too evenly matched. Once Zarnov slipped. The steering-wheel checked a fall. The two appeared merely to stagger against it, yet the thick oaken spokes cracked from the hub under the impact of a quarter ton of straining muscle. Zarnov's face remained pressed against Bull's breast, the yellow head remained erect. The grapple was a stalemate. Of the two, the Russian was the first to abandon his purpose.

His hands closed on Bull's belt. His elbows thrust outward as he pulled. The wet leather snapped, and instantly Zarnov caught the trousers and jerked downward, seeking to hobble Bull's legs. The cloth ripped as Bull jerked away. The hand under the Russian's chin snapped a six-inch punch against the bent head. Zarnov's feet flew from beneath him; he landed flat on the deck with a crash that shook the entire boat.

"Boots! Give him the leather, Bull!" Kelp screamed.

Bull snatched at his slipping trousers and shook his head. "He slipped." He panted. "He's got to admit—I'm the best man."

Zarnov, with booted feet upraised to ward off a rush, swore to himself in Russian. He seemed content to recover his breath, for he lay still, panting, and watching the taller man for an opportunity to get on his feet again. The mark of Bull's fist was red on the yellow cheek. Neither looked aside as a voice hailed them through the rain. Even Kelp had not remarked the approach of the revenue cutter, which had drifted to a stop at the edge of deep water.

"Bull and Zarnov's fightin'. For cripe's sake, Barehead, don't butt in now!" Kelp shrilled over his shoulder.

"I been watching through the glasses! Tell them to wait till I can launch a boat!" shouted the Coastguard lieutenant happily. Barehead Nelson was far too good a fighter himself to spoil sport.

Bull bent over his adversary. "Say what I told you if you're licked and I'll let you get up!" he promised.

"You go to hell!" the Russian growled. His thick arms shot backward. One hand closed on the broken wheelspoke and wrenched it from the rim. Feet first, his boots kicking at Bull's face, he bounded upright, with the short club drawn back for a smashing blow.

Bull leaped and caught the upraised arm. Zarnov drove a knee at the groin and twisted his squat body to throw the taller man off, but Bull had the club with both hands. Zarnov, who could not hold it, threw himself backward, taking Bull with him. The companionway door crashed into splinters, and both plunged down the narrow stairway into the cabin below. They were out of sight.

KELP made a running leap from his boat to the cruiser and dragged himself over the rail like a wrinkled monkey. Barehead Nelson, already in a dory, bent to the oars and vaulted over the rail at the old man's heels. No sounds had followed the crash of the door, and they feared that the fight had been ended by an accidental knockout. They peered down the stairway.

Bull lay on his back with his head on the lower stair. Zarnov knelt on his chest. Both gripped the broken wheelspoke, holding it, at the moment, across Bull's neck. The Russian was trying to force the stave upward and back so that he could get his knee on the other man's bearded throat.

"Say 'nuff! Bull," the Coastguardsman shouted. "He'll snap your neck like a twig!"

Bull rolled one eye upward. "Not while this spoke's here, he won't!"

Despite the advantage of position and leverage the Russian was unable to lift the bit of oak aside. The stave swayed between Bull's chest and his bearded chin as the shackle of an anchor chain sways above the water when a gale hurls itself upon an anchored ship, a motion all but infinitesimal in view of the forces involved, a yielding that is only a sign of a resistance too stout to break.

"Bull's stronger!" Kelp shrilled.

"Aye, a bit," the Coastguardsman whis-

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pered. "He's stronger, but he'll tire first. It ain't fair! He's lifting Zarnov's weight, and he can't use his legs on account of them stairs!"

Zarnov worked his knees nearer the bearded throat with savage persistence.

"You the poacher?" he growled. "You tell Barehead, huh?"

Sweat stood on Bull's forehead and ran into his eyes. The bearded lips were drawn back from clenched teeth, through which breath hissed. There was no other sound but the patter of rain on the deck, the drip, drip, drip of larger drops from the mast. Rain that would patter on the roof of a jail, that would drip from iron bars, day by day, week by week.

"Look at Bull's eyes! I got to stop this!" Barehead Nelson ejaculated. "We'll call this a draw. It ain't fair!"

"No!" Bull gasped. Slowly his chest filled with air for a supreme effort. Unexpectedly he let go the oaken stave with one hand. It was forced over his head at once, but his free hand had shot out and closed on the Russian's belt. The knee the Russian thrust forward missed its mark. Amazement broke out on Zarnov's face. With one hand Bull was lifting him into the air. With a yell the Russian twisted away the stave. He struck at Bull's head, only to have the blows fall on the arm that Bull had flung across his face. Flinging the stick to the deck, Zarnov caught the bearded throat with both hands. Bull attempted no defense. Though the struggle seemed slow to Nelson and Kelp, the throttling lasted only a few seconds, and Zarnov's total misunderstanding of his opponent's tactics helped Bull.

Bull could not lift the Russian quickly. He had two hundred pounds of dead weight at the end of his arm. Inch by inch he drew Zarnov upward and forward, but as the Russian was lifted Bull drew one leg forward until his knee was beneath the broad chest. Then Bull struck—twice—full-arm blows that snapped into the Russian's unguarded stomach. The fingers on Bull's throat relaxed. A thrust of Bull's bent leg sent Zarnov rolling to the other end of the cabin, and Bull got unsteadily to his feet, grinning at the two round-eyed men who stared steadily down at him.

"Zarnov'll be round in a minute. He'll have something to tell you about some sealskins, Barehead!" Bull panted. "He was trying to pass off his own stealings on somebody else, but Kelp sent for me, and I reckon I've knocked the truth out of him."

The Coastguardsman's eyes grew rounder. He rumpled the thick blond hair that had never been covered by a cap, even in the coldest weather.

"Sealskins, Bull?" Barehead grunted. "Bull, are you loco? I don't savvy this about sealskins, any more than I see how you licked him! Man, Zarnov's been tied up in Dutch Harbor for the last three weeks! He *can't* have shot any seal! I *know* he didn't, even if he swears on a Bible and all the saint's pictures between here and Leningrad. Besides, Bull, I got the tip from a Siwash that *saw* Stove Lid Wemyss shooting seals from your boat. Say, what kind of frame-up did Zarnov try to work on you? He knew that nothing would prove him guilty of anything but buying illegal skins!"

"Which he stole at that!" said Bull slowly. "Come on below, Barehead. I got to sit down." He lowered himself to the deck, elbows on knees, his great hands covering his eyes, while the bewildered Coastguardsman sprang down the ladder and leaned over him. The patter of the rain filled the cabin. It was a minute before Bull looked up.

BAREHEAD, you were a sourdough before you were a government officer. Will you do me a favor? I'll admit Stove Lid killed some seals. He's just a runt, and he was desperate. You know how it is when a little weak man goes on the prod? You've seen them fight, savage as a tomcat, and crying all the time. Stove Lid was crazy as a cat having a fit. He didn't know what he was doing, and he'd never do it again. His wife was sick, outside. Locking him in the jail won't do nothing to protect the government seal. It'll be hell on Stove Lid's wife. Why not let me send him out

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of the country. He don't belong here."

Bull pulled the three-pound gold poke out of his pocket. "That'll buy his passage, and give him a start. You'll be doing your job, and helping a man that's always going to need help. Stove Lid ain't like Zarnov. He ain't a natural thief, nor—smart."

"What's the favor you want me to do *you*, Bull?" said the Coastguardsman. "I understand how it is with Stove Lid, and I'm damn sorry. But if I let him off half the settlers along this coast are going to get desperate over some sick relative outside and start poaching seal. I'll take the dust to send to Stove Lid's wife—" He broke off. "What's the matter, Bull. You look funny, like you was listening to something?"

"Do I? Just tired fighting, I guess," grunted the big man, but despite the effort of his will his hands began to tremble. "Sure, take the dust. I'll go back to creek and get more," he went on. "I'm big enough that I don't need favors—I guess."

Barehead made no reply. The drumming of the rain echoed in the cabin, and Bull's hands were shaking more and more. To regain control of himself he stood up, his eyes wild, and his bearded lips working, but the spasmodic jerking of his muscles only grew worse. Surely, as though he was struggling against an invisible enemy more powerful than Zarnov, his arms bent upward and upward until his hands covered his ears.

Wise in the ways of the North, Barehead Nelson watched, but did not interfere.

"What were you listening to!" he demanded.

"The rain!" Bull groaned. "I can't help listening to the damn, *drip drip drip!* The damn thing never stops! Why can't it stop! Why can't——"

"And you were going back to prospect—feeling like that?" the Coastguardsman ejaculated. "You won't last a week!"

"Who says I won't?"

"Me!" Barehead snapped. "It ain't necessary, either, if you aren't too proud to let me do you a favor. See here! I can't let Stove Lid off, but I *can* see that he gets a short sentence. Meanwhile you take back this gold, go outside, and find his wife. You can look after her better than any little shrimp. When Stove Lid has served his sentence, I'll buy his passage home myself. Why Bull," said Nelson hastily to forestall any objection, "I've paid more to see a worse fight, and Mrs. Wemyss won't know you ain't really Stove Lid's pardner! Lie to her! Tell her he helped you find the dust. The law will be satisfied that way—and you ought to be!"

"And am!" said Bull Jennifer. "Say, do you think I've been waiting in this rain to show off?" Grimly he smiled at his shaking hands. "It's hell to be weak and know something has got you licked. That's why I couldn't let Stove Lid down. One man in hell was enough!"

If you thrill to the deep rumble of native drums and the menace of African savages read

"Death's Larder"

a novelette by

L. PATRICK GREENE

next issue

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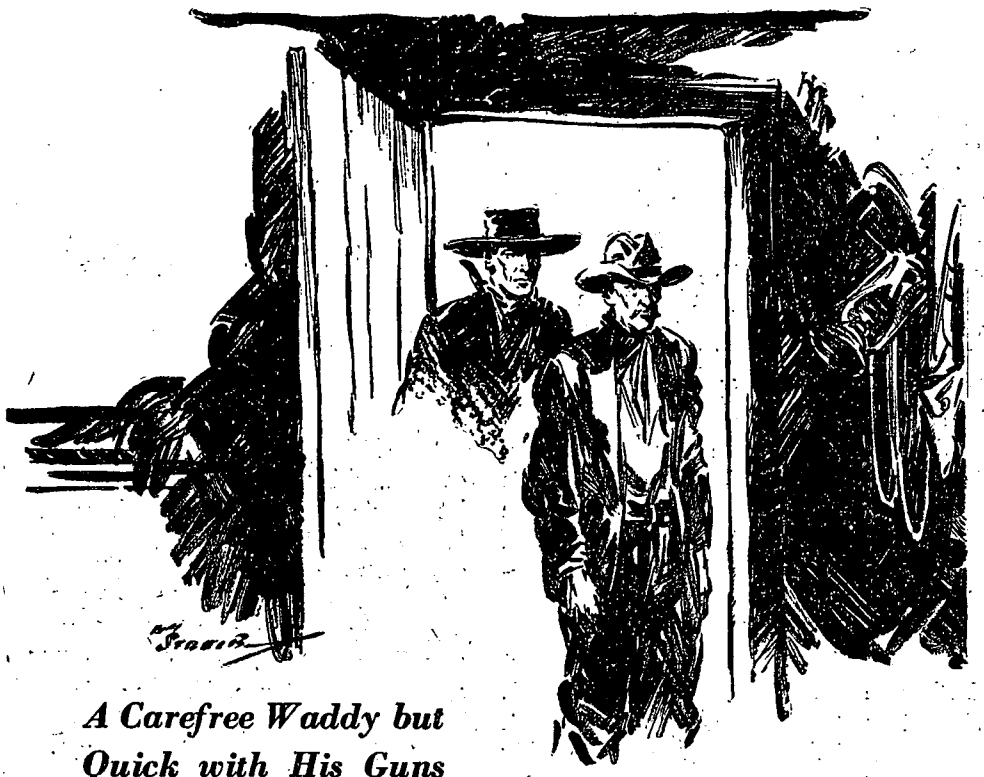

A Carefree Waddy but Quick with His Guns Was

RED CLARK *of* TULLUCO

HOW THE STORY BEGAN

IT WAS something of a surprise to Red Clark, after a night of drinking and good-natured pranks, to wake up and find himself in the Tahzo jail. But what happened to him after he began to talk to the sheriff was a still greater surprise.

"You're Sheriff Clark's boy, from Tulluco, ain't you?"

Red retorted with some drunken witticism, and the sheriff frowned. "Your dad," he said, "was one of the best friends I ever had. I sorta hoped you might take after him. Come over to my office. I want to tell you a story."

On the way over, Red felt that the sheriff was studying him closely. It looked as though he had some scheme up his sleeve, though he said little.

The story the sheriff told was one of the brutal murder of a girl named Bessie Rand. Because it looked as though he'd done it, residents of Tahzo had lynched a young cowboy. He had been close to the girl, had been in love with her in fact. But too late the sheriff had discovered that this boy was not guilty. Then, for a time, it had looked as though a reformed outlaw named Leon Lenard was really the guilty man, for the sheriff had learned that the knife used to commit the crime was Lenard's; and to make it even more suspicious, Lenard had disappeared and had shown up in the vicinity of the lawless nearby town of Lelargo. Now the sheriff wanted to get word to the dead girl's brother and his pal, who had gone to Lelargo bent on avenging the murder by killing Lenard.

"I've since found out," said the sheriff, "that Lenard's not the guilty man, either. The real murderer—an' he's a man who's known an' pretty much respected hereabouts—is named——"

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Part II

of a Thundering Novel of the West

by

GORDON YOUNG

Here he suddenly broke off. Someone had been listening outside the door of the office and had betrayed his presence by a sound. Red Clark sprang to one door, and the sheriff to the other, when it suddenly became clear that there was not one man but two outside. Most amazing of all, one of these two turned out to be the sheriff's deputy, and before it was over the sheriff had had to kill the deputy. Red, moreover, had been forced to ride the sheriff's own horse, Blackie, toward Lelargo in order to warn young Rand before the second prowler, who was clearly a spy, should reach the town. It was obvious that the sheriff had felt that the tough gang in Lelargo knew something of the real murderer; and it was also clear that the sheriff had had the idea that someone like Red, who was a stranger, could fulfil the mission in Lelargo much more safely than anyone else.

On the way, Red found it necessary to kill the unknown spy who was trying to reach Lelargo before him; and it was only later that he was to find out that this man was Cliff Hammon, a not too trustworthy man in the employ of Lelargo's biggest cattle king, old Bill Powell.

Once in Lelargo, Red found Bessie Rand's brother and his pal Wilkins without any great difficulty; but after he had delivered the sheriff's message, he saw that things were looking very complicated in other ways. The sheriff had had no time to reveal to Red the name of the real murderer, and here was young Rand so badly wounded from a gunfight that he was completely out of the picture. According to what Red was able to discover for himself, moreover, evidence seemed to point to old Bill Powell's son, Buddy Powell, as the real murderer; and this boy was a petted and spoiled young scapegrace who had always been protected by an over-indulgent and love-blinded father.

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Most surprising of all, when Red finally took a job with Powell's outfit, the T T, he discovered that Powell's right-hand man was the reformed outlaw, Leon Lenard. And in spite of the fellow's cold and utterly fearless eyes, Red had to admit that there was something admirable about him.

Then, following an unpleasant encounter with Buddy Powell, in which Red humiliated that young pup, Red was ambushed in a saloon. Although he escaped with his own life, he had to kill three men to do it. He himself was, besides, slightly wounded in the throat.

CHAPTER XI

"Red's Square!"

WITH some of his men about him, old Bill Powell was standing out in front of the hotel, giving some of the boys a little more time to get through with their breakfast, when Red came up. Following him were a few of the men who had started down the street to see what all the shooting was about.

Old Powell looked him over. "Well, what's happened to you!"

Red gurgled, twisted his neck, patting it with the neckerchief. "Had an argyment an' lost my voice!"

"You hit?" Powell snapped.

"No. Scratched." Red pulled away the kerchief and put his head to one side, pointing. "Spoiled my singin' voice!"

Kid-like, Johnny Howard had been among the first to dash out the back way and go to see what had happened. Now he came up the street on the run. His face blazed with excitement, and crowding up close he shouted, "Three of 'em down, Mr. Powell! An' the barkeep's fainted! Red here he done it——Cliff Hammon's friends!"

The men murmured and whistled softly as they looked from one to another.

"Thunders of Hell!" said Powell, astonished. "An' you told me you wasn't a killer!"

"I ain't, damn it!" said Red. "They sent word a man had come from Tahzo for to see me special; an' me bein' a curious fool, I went. Missed my breakfast, an'——Gosh I can't talk. I sound like a young rooster learnin' for to crow!"

The men eyed Red with curious respect. He was neither dour like most killers, nor preening his feathers like some; instead he looked pretty much like a good-natured boy who didn't quite feel at ease when being admired. They credited him, of course, with having done that shooting over at Tahzo—that is, all except Leon Lenard, who watched closely and said nothing—and so they thought that he had just about topped the speed record for lone-handed work.

"Go in," said Bill Powell, "an' wash up an' get your breakfast. I'm goin' to step round to Bundy's an' have a look. Come along, Leon."

Johnny Howard tagged after Red into the wash room, saying, "Oh, a lot of fellows can shoot an' do! But gee! In this man's town, to make a barkeep faint! That's got 'em all beat!"

Johnny would learn afterwards that the bartender, from drinking too much of his own liquor and from other similar habits, had a heart that wasn't just right. After the strain was over, the shooting would slow down to almost nothing; but that would only increase the youngster's brimming admiration, as expressed by his, "Give a barkeep heart failure—shoot at that one, you wall-eyed *hombres!*"

Red drank much hot coffee and that eased his throat a little; and though it hurt to swallow, he said it would hurt more not to, and that it was better that his throat should suffer than his stomach.

When Mr. Powell came back, Leon Lenard brought along Red's hat and handed it to him without a word, but with a steady look.

Johnny had tied a rag about Red's neck to help stop the blood, and as Red's shirt was torn and covered with blood, Mr. Powell sent a man to rouse up a storekeeper and get a couple of new shirts together with some other things, such as underwear and the tooth brush that Red said he had forgotten to buy.

"Only one thing wrong with your job, Red," said Mr. Powell, drawing back his head and cocking it a little to one side,

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critically. "That fellow you cracked over the head may get well. Otherwise you done noble. Bundy's crowd'll keep their tails between their legs for quite some time." Then he called out, "All right, boys. Let's be ridin'!" And to Buddy Powell, "Hop to the saddle, son. What you lookin' so down-at-the-nose about? If somebody'd plugged them tinhorns long ago, you'd have more money in your pocket."

Red felt suspicious about young Powell, but as nearly as he could judge, young Powell's glances toward him had nothing in them more than a kind of sullen curiosity, with pretty evident regret that this red-headed puncher had got farther than ever into the good graces of the Old Man.

Red discussed the matter with himself. "Maybe, now, he didn't have nothin' to do with my invitation to Bundy's place. 'Twasn't twenty minutes from the time he left me there in the barn till that gambler fellow showed up at the hotel—in the which case, this Bundy sure works fast. But I got me a suspicion it was all hatched last night. Which don't keep me from thinking that maybe Mister Buddy knew all about it even then. Yet somehow, I sorta feel maybe it was hatched in that twenty minutes—seein' as how I sure give him reasons for wantin' me to feel bad. Hmm! Funny my throat should feel more sore inside than out. Oh well, it'll help me for to keep my mouth shut."

Red knew nothing about the lay of the range or about Mr. Powell's plans, but simply rode along with the others and kept his ears open. There appeared to be no particular hurry; it was jog-and-walk, jog-and-walk, with an easy lope now and then for a mile or two.

Presently from what he overheard, and more clearly from what Johnny Howard explained, Red understood that the trouble lay over to the west, in what was known as the Nelis Range, where some highbinders had decided that Mr. Powell was trying to hold altogether too much range and had thrown in together against him. They had raided the Nelis Valley bunkhouse, sneaking up on the men Indian fashion, getting the drop, and telling them to go. Then the highbinders—that was Johnny's word for them—had set to work running T T cows out of the rich, well-watered valley and onto the open, dry, desert country.

"Most of that country over there is where hell used to be," said Johnny, "but it was too hot an' rough for Ol' Nick, so he moved. But she's sure a pretty valley! I was almos' born over there. My dad was a prospectin'—an' a burro was my nurse. Cradle too. Soon as I was big enough to steal one of Mister Powell's hosses, I done it. Later on I stole a better'n. Say, they chased me back'ards and forwards for days. An' when they caught me, they jus' stood an' looked. They was expectin' a full-growed hoss-thief, an' I was only a little nubbin of a kid. Mr. Powell he put me to ridin' for 'im. I don't know how old I was, but that was five years ago. Dad, oh hell! he was glad to be rid of me."

More of Johnny's chatter followed, then he explained, "Why, Red, this here is war! An' we're goin' into it the same as to a round-up! Two chuck wagons pulled out yesterday, an' the horse-herd too. I been into fights before with Mr. Powell!" Johnny put on the airs of a veteran. "Some of us is goin' to put up at the home ranch tonight, an' some'll push on. Us as stay closest to Mr. Powell'll have the most fun. He's waitin' for some word to come. Be right plumb sure, Red ol' son, that the devil is a-greasin' of his fryin' pans!"

Shortly before noon some six or seven riders, with old Mack at their head, waved their arms in vague, parting flourishes and without further ado left the road and headed cross-country. The other six or seven now set forward a little faster, and in a couple of hours came to the home ranch, where men were waiting for Mr. Powell. At the Powell house much talk went on, with men coming and going. Red patiently loafed in the shade of the bunkhouse, listening to whatever was said, but offering no talk.

After supper he returned to the shadows of the bunkhouse. Some time went by,

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then he heard Johnny's high-pitched voice asking for him, so Red got up and walked into the lighted doorway.

"Oh there you are. Listen. Come along up with me. You're wanted!"

About half-way to the house Johnny pulled at his arm, with "This way, Red. Over to the blacksmith shop. Somethin' nice is bein' cooked for you an' me!"

A dim figure detached itself from the darkness of the blacksmith shop and spoke, "All right, Johnny. Go tell Mr. Powell we're waitin'."

It was Leon Lenard, and Johnny turned about and went with stumbling haste.

"How's your throat?" asked Lenard, turning to Red.

"Sore, but better. Turned husky, as you can hear. Ain't easy for to talk. But listen. I want to ask you——"

"Be easier on your throat if I do the talkin'," said Leon. "You told me you was lucky; an' son, I'm beginnin' for to think you don't lie much. Got any notions about why you got into a dust storm over to Bundy's this mornin'?"

"Cliff Hammon musta been well thought of," said Red with a grin.

"Yeah, some folks was right sorry for to see Cliff quit his oneriness. But it wasn't that Bundy crowd. I'm a suspicious ol' coyote, son. This mornin', when you made out it was over Cliff Hammon, I had me some doubts. Just recent I've heard a man say he's never goin' to get over thinkin' you shot when Cliff wasn't lookin'. But have you by any manner o' means had a run-in with young Powell?"

"Sure have."

"Let's hear."

Red told him.

"Buddy's no nice boy for to have dislike you," said Leon quietly. "An' he's gettin' more'n more that way. Hmm."

"See here. Will you answer me jus' one thing, Mr. Lenard?"

"Maybe."

"That stag-handled knife with the spring blade—could *he* have took it unbeknown to you?"

"What's give you that notion?"

"You yourself."

"Huh? Me! An' ol' thin-lipped gook like me has been talkin' too much!"

"You was plum het-up over that matter we talked about yesterday. An' amongst other things, when you was thinkin' of the girl an' how she died you said you was sorry for Mr. Powell. After I seen this Buddy I thought maybe I understood why." Red had spoken as softly as he could, and stood up close to Lenard, waiting.

"Hmm. I reckon it can't hurt none to trust you, Red. I feel pretty much a hypocrite, boy. Mister Powell, he thinks I come a-runnin' 'cause he was havin' troubles on the range. I woulda come, an' allus have when he needed men; but I come really hopin', for to make sure I was plumb wrong in thinkin' maybe Buddy could've done it! He's gettin' rottener every minute he lives, but I ain't yet ready for to be sure he done a thing like that. You've got some reasons for to like Mister Powell too. So remember this carefully. You might jus' as well take a gun an' shoot Mister Powell as to make 'im ever believe a boy of his could do a thing like that!"

"I know. But see here, Mister Lenard. If Buddy done it, then he was usin' Cliff Hammon most confidential an' personal an'——"

"They're comin'. Mister Powell he wants you for to do something."

Mr. Powell came with Johnny at his heels. It was dark where they stood, but no light was needed.

"Red, how's your throat?"

"All right, almost."

"I want you to do a little scoutin'. You're a stranger, an' will be ridin' a horse that'll help folks to think they understand. Over in the Nelis country they may not know where the horse come from, but they'll know it ain't off my range. I want you to go to Nelis City. It's got three houses in it, maybe four, not countin' a saloon. Over there they'd shoot a T T puncher on sight. I got word that old George Robbins an' the fellows that's throwed in with him to clean me up is to meet here in two or three days for to make themselves some plans. I want to be among them as is present an' them that speaks, seein' as how it's my business they're to discuss. An' they sure don't expect me."

Red nodded that he understood.

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"Now then," the old man went on, "I'm goin' to be layin' back up in the hills. When George Robbins shows up, I want you to start a little fire. Burn down a house. Saloon, hotel, anything—just so it makes a nice big blaze for a few minutes. A few hours later I'll show up. If things go all right, I'll pay the damages. If not—well, I won't. But you be careful. Just us fellows here know I'm sendin' you. An' Johnny, he's to be your guide tonight an' point the way for tomorrow. You ought to get in about sundown tomorrow. Don't start no fire the first night, 'cause I won't be ready. But for the next half-dozen nights I will. If I can catch Robbins an' the locoed ringtails that's throwed in with him, I reckon that'll be quicker an' better than skirmishin' about, pottin' riders that are doin' only what they're paid to do, same as my men. With this job your wages is doubled, an' here's somethin' for to make a splash with while you're loafin'."

In the darkness Red could hear the clink of coins, and his fingers groped for the outstretched hand. He dropped the coins into his pocket, thinking it was a handful of dollars.

"May interest you for to know, Red, that in discussin' who to send, Leon here says all things considered, he'd risk you. 'Pears like some years ago——I can tell 'im, can't I, Leon? Well, 'pears like some years ago there was a certain Sheriff over in Tulluco that give Leon a heap o' trouble, an' Leon he's allus sort of admired the way that lone-handed sheriff worried him.

"An' you see how much I am trustin' you, don't you, Red? Some fellows might tell Robbins what was up—then start the bonfire!"

"In the which case"——Johnny snarled ——"such a fellow'd better jump in it. Be easier on 'im!" Then, hastily, "But Red's square—ain't you, Red?"

"When I don't think so, me, I'll quit usin' my dad's name!"

Chapter XII

DYING OF THIRST

RED and Johnny quietly rode off into the darkness, with Blackie on a rope, being led. There was a rifle under Red's leg, the saddle bags had been stuffed with grub, and two big canteens, now empty, clinked. Johnny chattered like a squirrel that has found a woodpecker's cache. Red listened drowsily.

At last they got into hilly country, and though it was pleasant enough by starlight, the rocky barren hills looked as though it would be a bad place to be, under the noon sun. Johnny explained with great detail what they were doing, but all Red understood was that this was a short cut. Now and then they paused to let the horses breathe. Shortly afer midnight they ate some sandwiches, and about three o'clock Johnny said, "Here's your last water till you sight Nelis."

They scraped about in a sandy mudhole until the canteens were filled, smoked two or three cigarettes, let the horses drink, then pushed on. An hour or two later they looked down from a high, barren hillside upon a wide sandy basin.

In the dawn Johnny pointed toward the basin, saying, "You'll think a baker's oven is a nice cool place in the shade afore you're across this basin, so you'd better make as many tracks as you can while it's cool. See that sharp-nosed peak across there? You can't go wrong. Ride straight for it till you strike the road, then turn right an' keep goin'. It'll bring you into Nelis City. But dont' go to dozin' in the saddle, Red, 'cause you may walk right across the road, which ain't nothin' but a wide cow trail. I don't know how you are for stayin' awake, but if you jus' have to take a nap, roll off, face down, an 'take 'er under your hat. There ain't no other shade till after you've been quite a piece up along the road. Comin' in this way they won't much suspect that maybe you've been near Powell's ranch."

Red changed his saddle to Blackie, who had had it easy through the night, then began to feel through his pockets to make sure that he had matches, tobacco and papers. Doing so he fished up the coins Powell had given him. They were not dollars, but gold pieces.

"Holy jumped-up Judas!" said Red huskily. "Mister Powell sure ain't no piker in dishin' out spendin' money! Here, Johnny, have some!"

"I get my wages reg'lar—even if I don't

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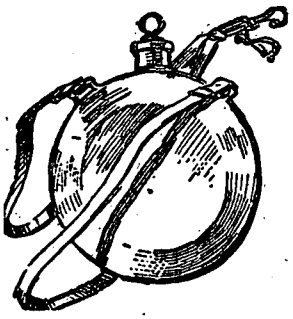
earn 'em. Mister Powell tol' me to hustle back to the ranch, but I ain't goin'. I know where he's makin' for, an' I'll be around up there, layin' on the trail. He'll cuss hell outa me—an' take me along with 'im! So you an' me'll meet in Nelis City—an' maybe fit a pair o' wings to ol' George Robbins. Devils has wings, too, ain't they?——S'long!"

Red went on slowly, lifting his eye now and then at the peak given as his landmark. The sun rose higher. At eight o'clock he washed Blackie's nose and mouth, because he wanted a drink himself and wouldn't cheat on a partner. His throat was sore and dry, so he filled his mouth and let the water trickle down. An hour later he poured some water into his hat and gave Blackie a drink; and so it went, a little at a time, but often. About noon his throat wasn't so sore, though it seemed scorched. The only really hard thing was staying awake, for Blackie went forward at a walk, which to the saddle-raised Red was like being in a hammock. He grumbled, "Here I am, out where I could sing my loudest an' not trouble anybody—an' I can't. Life's sure tough, ain't it, kid?" Blackie flecked his ears forward by way of reply. Red emptied one canteen and flung it away.

Shortly after noon, or thereabouts, Red struck a wide trail, running to the right. "Good thing Johnny told me to keep my eyes open," he thought. He drank heartily from the other canteen, filled his hat and told Blackie to get busy. Then he rode well off the trail and flung the canteen into a patch of cactus. "T T" had been painted on the canteens, Red noticed as he did so, probably just to forestall arguments when two or three outfits were together.



Red settled in the saddle, put his hands on the horn, gave Blackie his head, and went to sleep. Every few minutes he came to, but promptly he dozed off again. Late in the afternoon they climbed out of the basin, passed through some scrubby timber, and presently saw Nelis City, in the distance—its few buildings looking not unlike some badly baked biscuits that had been tossed away by a disgusted cook.

Red scanned the surrounding country, trying to figure just where Mr. Powell was most likely to stop, waiting for his signal. There seemed to be a lot of half-grown mountains scattered about the small, narrow valley in which the town stood.

"If Johnny used to play in this country for his front yard, I don't envy him none his childhood," said Red.

He touched Blackie with the spurs. "Come on, son, we got to look all frayed out an' travel-sore—pertend we're exhausted. So you jus' hang your head down between your front legs like you was ashamed o' yourself. An' me—I'll pertend I'm dyin' of thirst!"

MR. POWELL had guessed that Red would get into Nelis City in the "cool of the evening"—but there was nothing cool about it. Not a breath was stirring, and all the heat that the sun had poured down during the day now seemed to be oozing out of the ground and from the buildings. A hot haze simmered over the valley.

A few men on backless chairs—their backs propped against the wall—sat in front of the saloon. They had watched him from afar; and now, straightening in their chairs, they looked more closely at him as he came near.

Red climbed off wearily, staggered, gurgled and pointed toward his mouth. It was a pantomime well understood in Nelis City. Whether Blackie had understood his instructions, or was really weary, he put his nose almost to the ground and looked woe-begone.

Red drank from a cup that was brought, licked his lips and pointed toward the horse.

"Why, feller, yore tongue ain't swole—an' that hoss ain't desert dry!"

Red gurgled and pointed to the bandage on his throat, then made a gesture as if writing. One of the men went next door and came back with paper and pencil; and Red wrote:

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Shot—throat—can't talk.

They nodded and eyed one another questioningly, but there was the color of blood on the rag about his neck.

"If they get too inquis'tive," Red reflected, whimsically, "I'll sprain my wrist!"

Everyone looked at him, looked at his horse, looked at everybody else understandingly, and dropped a few words in Spanish. Red pretended not to understand. They thought they knew why he had come, but they were curious about how he had got there. Beyond that they did not seem in the least unfriendly. They took him for a horse-thief on the dodge, and that inclined them toward courtesy; for Nelis City, like hell itself, was the sort of place where only bad men stayed. They were a little suspicious; for, as a wolf smells a trap in every piece of iron, they had doubts about every stranger. Red wore two guns and carried a rifle, his face was unshaven, there was dried blood on his neck; and all in all, he passed muster well enough not to be pointedly questioned. Questioning, of course, would have been very bad manners for Nelis City, the same as intimating that he was suspected of being some sort of fool law officer or T T spy. Either suspicion was to be regarded as an insult.

Red wrote on the paper:

Eat, sleep—where? Horse, too?

The saloonkeeper was known as Mike. He had sunburned red hair, and was a big man, carrying much of the lazy fat that usually pads the bones of saloon-keepers. He told one of the men to go along with Red and talk for him; then he asked, "You rode far today?"

Red shook his head, then wrote:

Prospeckter over there been keepin me.

Mike spelled out the writing and the men nodded. That seemed to explain. Somehow or other, this young red-head had fallen with a desert rat, and so had been taken care of.

Red rolled a cigarette and lighted it, throwing the match down before he shook out the flame. Then, casually, he stepped on it and started off with the man whom Mike had sent along.

"Gosh!" Red thought, as they went on. "Start a fire in this man's town. It's all adobe —But my dad allus said, 'a man can do anything he has to.'"

But the corral, at the other end of the town, he noted, was not adobe; nor was the *ramada*. And there was also a pile of hay lying there, and the blacksmith shed was close by. Red lighted another cigarette and flung down the match. It touched a spot of bunch grass and awakened it into a tiny flame. He unhurriedly scraped it out with his foot.

"F'r a feller that looks range-wise, you're some careless that-away," said his companion.

Red was then taken over to a dirty restaurant, back of which were bunks and rooms. It was the nearest thing that Nelis City had to a hotel. There weren't half-a-dozen houses in the town.

Red found that his throat was much better, so he put a big pebble into his mouth just to help him remember that he couldn't talk; and that night he played poker, which is well suited to pantomime, and sipped beer, having explained that whisky hurt his throat. He kept his ears open without seeming to listen, and almost swallowed the pebble when he overheard a man say, "I sorta smell the stink of a T T man, same as a pole cat."

Red frowned over his hand, and very carefully did not look up—just then. He needed four cards to make his hand a good one; so he threw away four cards and getting up, with a kind of solemn grin walked around his chair in the way that some fellows do when hopeful of tugging at Lady Luck's petticoat to get a little favorable attention.

The man who had the extremely sensitive nose was a little, dark fellow with eyes like a pair of black beads; and being slightly drunk, he sat on one chair, his feet on another so that he was propped against a nearby table. Red guessed that he had thrown out the remark just to see what might happen, just as some suspicious men will always shoot in the dark.

The four cards that the dealer handed to Red were no better than those he had tossed away; but he played as if they were, got called, and so lost a nice, tall stack of chips.

The saloonkeeper, who had called,

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chuckled with, "Bluffs is allus called in this here Nelis country!"

The little dark man took another drink of whisky and announced, just as if somebody had asked him, "Powell an' his *hombres* ain't a-goin' to git outa the valley alive—none of 'em! Nossir!"

Red was dealing. The man's remark almost gave him a chill. It seemed to hint of knowledge that Powell was coming. Red coughed real hard, and went on dealing. When he looked down he spied four aces, and that made him feel cheerful. Then he grew sad. Four aces—right off the bat—on his own deal? Sure was tough luck. He threw one ace away, lighted a cigarette and flung the match down—still flaming. The floor was plain adobe, so there was no danger.

Red quit the game rather early, being dead tired, and having much to think about; but before he went to his bunk he walked down to the corral. He rather suspected—and he certainly hoped—that somebody would follow him, just to see what he might be up to. He climbed on the corral and whistled, coaxing. Blackie was a bit suspicious, but he edged up, sniffing, and began to nibble the sugar. Red petted the horse for a time, then turned away. Lighting a cigarette, he threw down the live match, but quickly stepped on it. He saw two tall shadows stir over by the haystack, and knew that men had crept up just to see what deviltry he was up to. Well, they had seen him telling his best friend goodnight. That was all.

Red rolled into his bunk and meditated, troubled. He had overheard much talk; but he knew that they were but the clipped, jerky, broken sentences of men who had talked the same thing over and over so much, and who had such intimate knowledge of the country, that they understood each other perfectly. He did not see how it could possibly be, yet they seemed to know that Powell would raid "the valley"—get in easy enough, but never get out alive. That worried Red. There was no possible way for him to get word to Powell. Yet, could these men of Nelis City be half so unconcerned if they expected Powell? That was puzzling.

Red decided, "My voice has got to get some better. 'Sides, it makes me sort o' lonesome, bein' dumb. An' I got to nose around on Blackie an' get me the lay of the land some. I may have to get out in one gosh-awful hurry. If I ever do get out of this here Nelis City, I'm goin' behave myself careful, so I won't have to come back after I die."

THE next morning Red began to croak a little, but he pretended that it was hard work and that he was pleased. He leaned on Mike's bar and said, "Better," pointing at his throat and nodding joyfully.

"Must be awful, Dummy," said Mike, "if you lose your temper an' can't cuss."

"'Tis!" Red squeaked, sucking in his breath and drawing in his stomach.

Then, by much squeaking and some writing on the paper, he made Mike understand that he wanted somebody to ride about with him, point out the trails and roads, give him the lay of the land; and held out a gold piece to show that he was willing to pay.

Mike eyed him thoughtfully and grinned. "Was you wantin' to get anywhere, special?" Red shook his head. "Jus' have spells of the saddle itch now an' again, huh?" asked Mike.

Red nodded. "Only way to cure it is for to ride—fast!" Red grinned. "But the country is right troubled some at the present time."

"Yeh?" Red squeaked, trying to show interest without appearing overly curious.

"You'd sure knowed it if you'd rode in the other way. I don't understand yet how you made it. Not more'n two waterholes anywhere in the basin. You musta found 'em both. Plum lucky fellow!"

Mike explained to some of the men that Red had a hankering to look at some of the scenery round about, and the little, dark man with eyes like black beads, whose name was Pincher, eyed the gold piece. At a hint from Pincher, Red bought a bottle of whisky, and Pincher very obligingly offered to carry it.

They rode out of town. Pincher was a waspish, savage fellow, full of grievances

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against the world; but before the bottle was half-empty he declared that he had taken a liking to Red on sight, and that he was sure one white man! Pincher was right there to tell the world. Pincher told as much of the world as was within earshot what he was always willing to do for his friends—and with some zigzag siddling of tongue and hazy talk about what was coming to him and soon to be paid, he asked Red if he could lend him some money.

Red did. Pincher then proposed that he and Red hook up together and steal some cows. George Robbins was a good old fellow who never asked where range mavericks came from. Pincher cursed Powell up and down, and said he knew him well, having worked for him. Young Buddy Powell was all right, was a fine fellow, but the old man was a sneakin', onery cowstealer with no backbone a-tall. He didn't know good men when he saw 'em. Anyhow, his day on the range was done; he was heavily in debt, didn't have a friend in the world, his men wouldn't back 'im up. An' what was more he'd been kicked off the Nelis Valley range, his cows run out; an' if he so much as dared poke his head inside the valley he'd be shot, an' all the men with him, too, because George Robbins, Pete Strodd and Walt Wiggins had men campin' right at the mouth of the canyon, just waitin' for Powell to come bustin' in!

"But ain't *this* Nelis Valley?" Red asked, forgetting to be squeaky as he swept his arm across from the hillside along which they were riding.

Pincher didn't notice Red's change in voice, being a little drunk and much excited. "Naw. You come through Nelis Basin into this here Nelis *City* Valley, an' about twenty mile down it widens out an' *is* Nelis Valley. The road into the valley is 'cross over yonder. We'll ride that way tomorrer if you want, an' I'll show you some trails. I know this country like I know my hat. It's God's own country an' no questions asked. The six-gun tells it all, an' the law ain't got no ears."

Red asked cautiously, "Does Robbins pay good wages?"

"To men like me an' you he would. Mike's told two or three of us up there to set an' wait; that maybe Robbins'd be along pretty soon. He don't hire nobody but killers; an' me, I'm well knowed. Yessir! Do you an' me hook up together an' throw in with Robbins? I'll vouch for you. What you say?"

Red said, "Maybe."

Pincher said it was too hot to go any farther. Besides, he was beginning to get drowsy, and so they turned back. An hour later Pincher was dead drunk across a table; and Mike, without haste and without anger, dragged him by the scruff of the neck into a corner and let him lie there.

"Don't ever tell 'im I told you," said Mike, opening a bottle of beer for himself, "but ol' Powell once held 'im out like that"——Mike extended his arm full length——"an' give him a quirtin' that plumb near skinned 'im, then set him on the toe o' his boot an' invited him to git!"

Red squeaked inquiringly. "What'd Pincher done?"

"I don't know. Stole a dollar off one of the girls there at Mekatone—mos' likely. He thinks he's goin' to work for ol' George Robbins. Ol' George wouldn't use 'im for to wipe out a skillet with. Me, I'm a Robbins man from toenails to hair-tip, an' this here is war to the knife. Robbins an' Powell have been enemies from the time hell was first hot enough to cook eggs. An' this here is the final show-down. Now, we've got the upper hand, an' are settin' pretty; but Bill Powell'll win or die—an' die fightin'. An' me, when I stand up an' look down at 'im, I'm goin' to take off my hat. He's a man!"

Red dozed through the heat of the day, as every one else did, drank much beer, listened, said nothing, played poker, dropped lighted matches, ate supper, fed Blackie some sugar, came back and played more poker, then rolled in and meditated. Nobody gave any hint that Robbins and his friends were expected to ride into Nelis City tonight—at least the only remark tending that way had come from the unreliable Pincher. But with Red orders were orders; so he slept pretty well, feeling somewhat relieved by knowing that big Mike had grown almost friendly.

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CHAPTER XIII

"The Young Señor Powell Sent Me!"

THE next morning Red rode out alone. Pincher had a bad head—"the falling sickness," Mike called it—and none of the other men took Red's hint about liking some company. Red's throat was much better; he talked some, and threw out the hint, partly because he did not want them to think he was snooping, and partly because he wanted somebody else, that he'd like someone other than Pincher to help him get the lay of the land.

He found more of the road on the other side of the valley, more ravines and box canyons and thick clusters of scrub oak, with here and there a thin trail that went winding up past the sprawling cactus that had somehow got a toe-hold among the flat faces of the rocks. "Good place to wait for somebody who ain't your friend," he thought, eyeing the broken rock ledges overhead.

He went on slowly, and had not gone far—some three of four miles—when he heard the clatter of hoofs ahead. The man was coming fast, riding hard. Pursued? Well, not closely anyhow.

Red started to get off the road and keep out of sight, then on second thought decided that he had better not seem to be hiding. He might be seen and have a hard time explaining—"Especially as my throat is still plumb bad," he said. He had ridden out openly, and as long as he stayed in the open, Mike and the men in town would bear out his story. But if he got caught trying to evade being seen he might have an argument——

Red didn't, of course, know what twists and turns the road took on ahead, and so he went back some fifty yards, the better to be in plain sight when the rider should come around the elbow of rock ahead. Red waited until he knew that the man was close, then he started up at a walk.

Horse and rider flashed on the turn, a Mexican who at the sight of Red, pulled up with a high swing of his arm and a jerk that sent his horse's head up and his forelegs pushing back stiffly on squatting haunches.

"Hi, señor, you are from the town?" the man called eagerly, a little uncertainly, like one who isn't sure, but who feels that he ought to be much welcomed.

"Yo soy!"

At that the Mexican seemed pleased; and as if reassured, he said rapidly in Spanish, "You are the guard on this road, but an enemy is behind you—there, Señor! in the town. One with red hair who spies. You have seen him?"

"Si," said Red. And though there was a good forty yards between he pulled his hat down tight.

"He is a stranger that has come across the desert, being guided by the son of the devil, so that you would not suspect him; and I have come to give you warning."

"Well, he 'pears to be a pretty nice sort of fellow," said Red, returning to English to pay himself a compliment. "How do you know? An' who in hell are you?"

"Ah, señor. I have brought you warning. And must now return. You will permit that an unknown friend departs in peace!"

Red had been touching Blackie with spurs and checking him with the reins, making him appear restive. In this way he had edged closer to the obliging stranger. Now he whipped a gun from its holster with *"Ven acá!"*

The Mexican protested, but came as told, with hands half raised and palms out.

"Now listen, feller! She's a hair trigger, an' I'm nervous. Move your horse off the road, over there into that gully, where you'll be walled in."

As the Mexican moved by him, Red almost gasped to see the brand T T; and when the man had faced about, palms still out and up, Red said, "Now take a look!" He pulled off his hat, held it for a moment and clapped it back. "So you see, I'm him an' you're *it!* Now talk. Who sent you?"

"Señor Powell, señor!"

"You're a liar! Another break like that an' you'll be a dead one!"

"Before God!"

"My gosh!" Red thought. "Would he play me such a trick?" Then he answered himself aloud, "He wouldn't!"

"It is truth, señor!"

"Old Bill Powell sent you over here to ——"

"No-no-no! The young señor!"

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"Yeah? What's your name?"

"Manuel."

"Come on. Tell a complete lie, while you're at it. Manuel—what?"

"Manuel Diaz, señor."

"That ain't no more your name than mine's Susy Ann. You see, I'm smarter'n I look. I thought there was somethin' kind o' familiar about your face." Red had never laid eyes on this Mexican before, but how was the Mexican to know that? "Now try once more; an' you'd better give me a name that fits!"

"Ho, señor, he is afraid of you! He ordered, he begged, he gave me much gold and many promises; he even made threats and swore that I must come or die! You will not kill one who could not choose!"

"Don't change the subject so much. We'll get 'round to all that, maybe. Give me time. What's your name?"

"Ramon Diego, señor," the Mexican said weakly.

"Maybe so. Now Señor Diego, you're in a mighty tight hole. I've got to kill you, the same as I would a rattlesnake—an' for the same reason. This ain't just between you an' me, nor me an' that cat-eyed Buddy Powell. If it was personal"—Red was really explaining his feelings as much to himself as to Diego—"I might give you a chance or let you go, as I've let many a rattler crawl off. But this is a range war.

Mr. Powell's life, an' maybe his fortune, hangs on it; an' he's picked me to do something I can't very well do if you don't cash in. I'm sorry, Señor Diego. God's lookin' at me, an' He knows I ain't sneakin' the draw to save my own hide, or doin' something like murder just 'cause I'm scairt. Fact is, I don't really blame you—I do too, but I'm not—I sure wish I didn't have to do it. Still, I can't take chances, because I'd be riskin' not my own measly self, but other fellows' lives an' goods. Better men that you an' me, Señor Diego. All I'm askin' is that you understand that I'm doin' it the same as if I was a soldier an' had my orders. So——"

The blood had gone from Red's face, and it looked like a sick man's; he was clammy with the cold chills that ran through his blood as if drippings of ice water had got into his veins. He scowled with set lips, straining to hold himself to the thing that seemed needful—to kill a man in cold blood—and he would have done it in another two seconds, for Red was one to go through with what he thought ought to be done.

All at once Ramon Diego began to talk hurriedly in Spanish, with something of a hurt dog's whimper in his tone. His purpose, of course, was to keep himself alive a little longer, though nearly every word he said gave added reason for shooting him—and young Buddy Powell, too.

"Señor! Ah, but wait until you have heard, for when I am dead there will be none alive who will tell you——"

Diego knew that every word he got out was like another little heartbeat to keep him alive; and so whether he told the truth, or told what would make any man listen, there was no way for Red to know. But Red listened while Diego said that for a long time young Powell had stolen, first a few, then more and more, cattle to make his pockets jingle when he rode where there were women and gamblers. Gradually he had gathered about him a gang of horse-thieves and cut-throats, and these, growing more crafty and needful of money, had killed and robbed miners. Sometimes Buddy had done these bloody deeds with his own hand, because he liked the smell of blood if it was not his own. Because of his name and his position, he rode unsuspected, for who would suspect the son of a rich man of stealing a few dollars? Often he had gotten into difficulties, the stories of which had reached his father's ears, yet either because of men's fear or their respect for old Señor Powell, these rumors had been quickly hushed up. Young Powell had done dark, cruel things and had lied with a ready smile. Even his own cut-throats trusted him not at all, yet used him to hide behind; and though he had no boldness, he had much cruelty and cat-like cunning.

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"He has much fear of you, Señor," Diego said, "and when he fears a man he hates him. You have killed his closest friend, thees Cliff Hammon, and at Mekatone others died who were to give you burial. Why he holds this fear of you I cannot say, but you must know it, for he has told me that single word from you to his father would be enough to make the old Señor kill him. Perhaps it is that you have met and talked with my cousin Benito Valdez; and though Valdez and I were not good friends, he was my cousin. And I, being a dying man, should speak the truth. Benito Valdez was not one to be happy in taking gold from between the devil's fingers, but that did not trouble me. My cousin's unhappiness grew and darkened him, until one day he said to me, though we were not good friends, 'Our fathers were brothers, and so I must warn you. Go far from this country and start tonight. God has cursed me. A ghost shakes my pillow in the darkness and commands me to speak! I go to my friends, who are honest men and will believe me, and tell them what I saw when I looked down from the ridge of that lonely trail. If God had not struck me dumb, so that I might speak later, I might have died at that moment because of what I saw.'——That was what my cousin Valdez said to me, Señor, and I laughed at him, for he was always one with other thoughts in his head than those a man needs. He rode off saying no other word to any man, and only I knew that he had gone. But a few days later—two or three—young Señor Powell came to me with a frown over his eyes and said, 'Where is Benito?'——'I do not know, Señor,' I replied. 'He was seen in Tahzo, and talked with the sheriff,' said the young Señor Powell. 'Ho ho,' I said laughing, and told him of Benito's madness."

The Mexican rambled on, the importance of what he was saying astounding Red Clark.

"The young Señor cursed till the froth flew from his lips and madness looked out of his eyes like a cat's eyes shine in the dark," continued Diego, "and he said—which I believed was a lie, but 'twas all one—that he had given Benito, my cousin, much money to carry and that he had stolen it. To keep us from following him, Valdez would tell the Tahzo sheriff of certain horses that had been run off the Tahzo ranges, Señor Powell thought. 'He will never come back, and he must pay!' said the young Señor.

"The devil is quick to help those who have need," Diego continued. "Señor Powell asked for Benito's gloves, and I found old ones. Then he went to Menkatone, and when it was night the young Señor went to the bank, where the old paymaster worked late. Being the old Señor's son, he was let in. He had wanted me to shoot the old man, but I would not, so he did it himself—in the back. He dropped the gloves on the floor. 'People will think Benito said he came with a message from my father and so was let in here,' said the young Señor Powell to me. 'Now we will have money—which I must have!—and Benito will be sorry that he rode off when I trusted him.' "

Diego paused to regain his breath. "All that is truth, Señor, with no word twisted; and when I am dead, will you see that the young Señor Powell does not live long? For though we were not good friends, Benito Valdez is my cousin, and it was not his fault that I did not love him more. ——He did not kill the paymaster at Mekatone! You have come from Tahzo—did you meet him there and so learn of much that is done in Lelargo?"

Red shook his head. He had turned his horse slightly, and now rested his gun and hand on the horn. Diego, in talking, had gesticulated, and from moving his hands about in such a manner, had let them come to rest on his saddle horn. Red, being very perturbed, eyed him and thought, "Now there's most as much reason for wantin' to keep him alive as there was a minute ago for puttin' him away. But what to do with 'im? I can't trust 'im, an' most likely he'd lie like hell. Besides, a Mexican's word against Buddy Powell's wouldn't go far, not in the Old Man's ear. An' me, I'm all in a muddle."

"Por Dios!" Diego shrieked and pointed with astonishment exploding on his face. "He has heard every word!"

Red reined up with a startled jerk, and looked behind him, his gun muzzle poised

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across his breast ready to whip down. No one was there. It was an old trick, but always a good one if well played; and it was the jingling clink of the bridle chains that brought Red's head about as Diego skillfully made his horse rear and then fired, putting a bullet that struck with the jar of a hammer blow in the shoulder hump of the saddle tree.

Red with a snap shot that grazed the neck of Diego's horse, killed the Mexican outright. The mingling echoes rang from rock to rock. The horse flung its head wildly, and with a half-turn dropped fore-feet to the ground and shook its head, trying to shake out the sharp pain of the bridle's bite in its mouth as Diego's body listlessly sprawled off, head down.

"So that's that," said Red, gazing down thoughtfully, and half unconsciously prodding out the empty shell. "Funny now, he felt he had to tell me some truth to make me listen. Then he felt he sure had to kill me because I knowed too much! *Hmm!* I reckon he guessed about right at that. *Hmm!* Now, I could poke him away somewhere out o' sight—but there's the horse.

"Now I wonder, did that nice little boy Buddy know jus' *why* I was over here? Or did he happen to learn that I'd been sent, an' thought I was jus' scoutin'? No, I don't think he'd have busted any of the Old man's war plans like that. That'd be hittin' hisself right in the face, hard. Buddy? Such a nice gentle-soundin' name. Well, I'm gettin' plumb tired of bein' shot at by folks I don't know an' never saw before."

BACK in Nelis City, men were waiting about Mike's doorway. Somebody had seen Red crossing the valley, leading a horse with a body over the saddle. He came up before the saloon at a slow walk and stopped. The men eyed him with suspicious silence, waiting for him to tell what had happened, while they listened critically. The dead man lay stomach down, with face hidden. His hat dangled from a saddle thong.

Red sat there on his horse, waiting too, not saying a word.

"Meet somebody you knowed?" Mike asked very quietly, but with a hard look.

"No, I didn't. Thought maybe you fellows might know 'im. He mistook me for on' o' you."

"Yeah?"

They walked nearer, moved the body, walked about the horse, and grew excited in a sort of calm reserved way. T T horse. Pincher said it was the body of Ramon Diego, and a pretty good fellow—for a Mexican! There were questions, no longer suspicious, since the dead man was off the T T range.

Red put his hand to his throat, letting them understand that it wasn't easy to talk, but told them, "First thing I knowed, there he was with his horse r'ared up, settin' on its hind legs, an' him shootin'—right there! See? Might've busted my saddle fork! Wasn't no time for to ask questions, so I done what I could, which was plenty, an' then brung 'im along in for you fellows to do your own guessin'. He must have just naturally thought I was from town here; which, in a way o' speakin', I was. But if he ever seen me before, it sure wasn't when I was lookin' at him."

Nearly all day the matter was discussed, and none of the guesses satisfied the men; but they felt reassured in the opinion that Diego was a lone horseman. Had he not been alone, other T T men would have pounced down on Red. Perhaps Diego had been on the scout. But if he had he'd made a bad job of it.

Big Mike took Red off to one side and said, "This here is like playing poker blindfolded. But I got a notion that Diego rode this way expectin' to meet somebody—maybe hear something."

"Yeah?"

"My cards are face up. I don't quite trust Pincher. Yesterday did he by any happen-chance say anything you could twist around to sort o' make fit?"

Red looked up thoughtfully, studied, and shook his head, "He ain't the sort I'd trust with nothin' I wasn't hankerin' for to lose, but——" Red tossed a live match away from the end of his cigarette.

"Don't you ever shake out your match!" asked Mike sharply.

"Must be from the time I burnt my

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fingers bad as a kid. Seems like I just got to drop 'em, quick!"

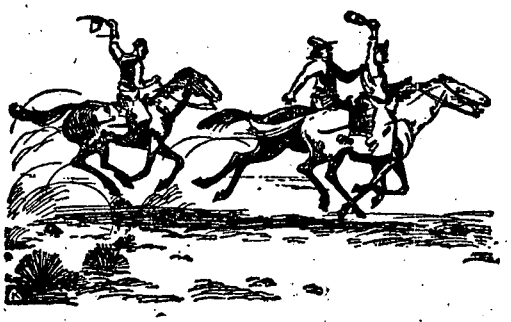
"I noticed that.——So you wouldn't suspicion Pincher if you was me?"

"No sir." Red shook his head.

"Well, I jus' will, anyhow. He's nosey an' mean. He'd steal candy off a cripple child an' hunt for somebody to grin when he bragged about it. An' didn't you hear 'im say that Diego was a pretty good fellow? That jus' slipped out before he thought—now what the hell?"

Three of four horsemen were pounding into town and came with a *"Yippee-ki-ee-eye-oh!"*

Some man put his head inside the saloon door and bawled out, "Hey Mike! Pete



Strodd an' two other hell cats is here!"

The horses were jerked up into a stiff-legged stop before Mike's place, the reins fell, and with a loud and joyous greeting the newcomers stamped into the saloon.

Pete Strodd was a well-built, hard-looking man, and a grin, ears wide, brightened his hatchet face as he came in. He held his hand out to Mike and said, "She's all over! Powell's laid down. He knowed he was licked—an' he's out there roundin' up them cows that we kicked through the canyon. We've been settin' up on the hills, watchin' an' waitin'. He ain't goin' to try to bust in. We hear he wanted to make it a fight, but his men quit cold. Said they stood no show, the which shows they're wise *hombres*. They could've come in, all right. But git out? Not without usin' the trap-door to hell!"

"I'm rejoicin', Mister Strodd," said Mike as he went behind the bar and set out bottle and glasses. "But if 'twas me now, I'd keep right on watchin' an' waitin' —hopeful. Bill Powell ain't one to disappoint somebody as is expectin' a fight."

"Sure hope not!" said Strodd, and echoes of the same opinion went up from the two men that had come in with him. "But he's done. He can't get the men. We got men settin' up on all the trails an' hilltops. An' there ain't been a symptom of—we'd have heard if he was up to anything!"

"If I was you," said Mike in a very soft voice, "I wouldn't put no great lot of trust in what news you don't hear. Some T T man was right in here close to town this mornin'——"

"The hell he was! Who? Where is he? Good gosh!"

"This here young stranger"——Mike waved a hand toward Red—— "was out for to see some scenery. One of Powell's Mexicans—Diego—an' this here young stranger brought Diego along in for us to look at."

"Where is he? Diego? What'd he have to say?" Strodd asked it with his eyes on Red.

Mike answered, " 'Pears like Diego done his talkin' with a gun, hasty-like. Red, here's got a sore throat from a bullet bite. Hurts 'im to talk much. But 'pears like he can shoot. Least-wise, Diego had all the symptoms of bein' dead when Red here brung him in!"

Strodd and his two hell-cats expressed a lot of wonder as to how Diego could have got through the hills, and questioned Red. Strodd came to the point bluntly with, "Where you from?"

Red smiled slowly, put his fingers to his throat and answered huskily, "So far I ain't said."

Mike explained. "He come in across the Basin. Fell in with a prospector over back in them hills that put him through——"

"I asked," Strodd repeated, never taking his eyes off Red, "where you from?"

RED was in a pinch. He was afraid to say Mekatone, or even Tahzo, lest these men know that if he came from either of those towns he must have pushed across Powell's country to reach the Basin. Red did not know the lay of the country well enough to lie—or yet to dare tell the truth.

He smiled again and shook his head,

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saying, "If I lied you'd know it. I come from far off, an' most of the way in a lope. For some reason or other there was right smart smoke behind me. Once or twice I traded horses—sort o' coaxin' for to get the best of the bargain. Bein' a stranger, an' not havin' no map, I don't know myself just how I got here. It ain't easy for to talk, an' I've said my say."

"Aw hell, Pete," said one of his men, "he's brung down a T T rider—the which is more'n I've done so far!"

"Have a drink?" said Strodd.

"Sure," said Red.

At that Pincher, hopeful of being invited, and ready to speak up now that Red seemed to be taken into favor, said, "I'll vouch for 'im, Pete. An' you know *me!*"

Strodd growled and snorted, but Pincher wasn't sensitive and so took his drink, slapping Red on the back as he did so. Red whirled as if kicked, "Slap me in the face anytime you like, feller! But keep your hands off my back!"

Pincher grumbled a sour apology and said this was no way to act toward a friend who'd just vouched for him.

Strodd expressed the opinion that "Diego's done what vouchin' is needful, for the time bein'."

An hour or two later Walt Wiggins and another man rode in.

Wiggins was squat, dark, silent and an old-timer. He had the name of being about the deadliest gun-fighter in that part of the country, where nearly every man was prompt. It was known that Wiggins wore short-nosed guns with no sights, and with triggers tied back, and that he went for his rifle if the range was much over thirty yards, as it seldom was in any of the hot-blooded killings of cow towns. Folks said that face to face he couldn't be beaten on the draw—at least he never had been.

He heard about Diego, and brooded, giving Red a long scrutiny, and admitted that he couldn't make head nor tail of it. He spoke jerkily, saying, "If anybody was scoutin', 'twould be that ol' Leon Lenard. More sneaky than a coyote. I run 'im out of this here country onct.——Give me some whisky!——An' you little wart off a pickle—git away!"

Pincher drew far off to one side of the bar and waited for the bottle to slide down within reach.

"Ol' George said we was all to be here by sundown," Strodd remarked. "He'd better hump hisself."

"Better," Wiggins growled. "I'm goin' to lay the law down. George Robbins is too easy satisfied. Kill Powell, an' who's to hold the T T? That kid o' his'n ain't got the fightin' guts of a mangy sheep. ——More whisky!——We got Powell on the run. Run 'im clear outa the country. Some spoils o' war is what I want. An' when the smoke clears away, I'm goin' to be pushin' my cows over on the Mekatone range. You stickin', Pete?"

"That's a big mouthful for to chew, Walt."

"'Taint.——More whisky!"

"Well let's wait an' see what ol' George says."

"I know what he's goin' say. He's goin' say whatever I tell 'im to!"

An hour later Old George Robbins and six men at his side came through the dusk with a stormy clatter of hoofs and gleeful *yip-yips*. Congratulatory greetings were exchanged. Powell wasn't even going to strike back. He must have heard, they said, what was waiting inside the canyon for him if he rode in. All sorts of reports were in the air; Powell had left the range work to one of his men and gone back to Mekatone, he was trying to sell out, his men had quit cold, and so forth and so on.

Old George Robbins was more puzzled and more uneasy than Strodd or Wiggins had been over Diego. Old George was a gray wolf of the range who, like Powell, had fought every step of the way up, fair means or foul, and was tricky and full of courage. He used bad men because they were the best men for his needs; and being a crafty, suspicious fellow, he knew that there was some reason more than mere guess-work had been able to discover why Diego had showed up on the road so near Nelis City.

He questioned Red, and Red gave him the same story that he had told Mike. It was a simple tale, and plausible. And Red, having a queer sort of conscience, said to himself, "It's so near the truth that I ain't much of a liar!"

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As he stood before the big, gaunt form of old George, answering questions, he dropped a live match from the tip of his cigarette. A moment later the cigarette went out, and another live match was flung to the floor.

"You look like a pretty good fellow," said old George, "but I wouldn't have you on my range till you learned better'n that!"

"I've been cussed a lot for it, but I still got hopes. Maybe I'll stop smokin'."

"Well, I been expectin' word from over that-away," said old George to Strodd and Wiggins. "Cliff Hammon mighta sent Diego, but hell,"—turning on Red—"you say he r'ared up an' let go at you on sight?"

"That's what I said. An' I'll say onct again, I never saw the fellow before."

"You lookin' for work?"

"I'm goin' to be, if I keep on playin' poker with Mike."

"Funny," said old George, "that you'd be ridin' off over there alone that-away!"

"He asked for company, Mr. Robbins," said Mike.

"Yeah? Well, Red, I hear you're ridin' a horse with a vented J R," said old George, who could not quite lay aside his suspicions. "A good one. The J R is a Tahzo outfit." He paused, waiting for Red to explain. Red did not. "Well?"

"You said it all yourself," Red answered.

"You keep a close mouth, don't you!" old George snapped.

"George! I've suspicioned 'im all along!" Pincher squawked. "He's been borin' into me with questions an'——"

Red half turned and with a back-handed blow he smashed Pincher in the face, knocking him backwards and jumping at him, jerking him up, slapping first one then the other side of his head. Then he tripped him and threw him before old George's feet.

"Once I picked me up a skunk by the tail," he said, dusting his hands, "I didn't get my hands near so dirty as now. Question him good, now. Hear it all, so maybe you won't think later on I've shut 'im up on purpose!"

Old George looked down at Pincher and poked him with a foot. "Hit yore hoss an' git! Git clear outa town. Git off my range. Git outa the county!" he said to Pincher.

"Yeah," said Red. "An' just for to make sure he don't take the best horse by mistake in the dark, I'm goin' down there to the corral till he's rode off. An' I'd like me some company. Witnesses is a good thing for to have when you're a stranger."

Chapter XIV

"I'm Through—If You Win!"

SO IT happened that three or four men walked with Red and Pincher down to the corral. Red stopped in at the restaurant and got some sugar, and leaning over the top of the corral he called Blackie up. It was a clear, starlit night.

Pincher, in sullen silence, saddled and rode off, followed by taunts; and one of the men said to Red, who was still on the fence, pulling Blackie's ears, "I reckon if a feller was sleepin' on his belly in the dark, Pincher might shoot."

"He'll go over an' work for Powell," said another. "Powell uses them kind."

Red said nothing. He stayed on the corral until the others said they'd better be getting back if they wanted to eat. As they turned away, Red got down and paused to light the cigarette he had been holding for a long time. He hastily flung the match behind him, glanced to see where it had fallen, and went on.

A few steps farther a dancing light in the shadows caused him to stop and call out, "Holy smoke—fire!" He turned back on the run, grabbed the only pitchfork, and began frantically to pitch the burning hay—making sure that the whole of the small stack would catch on fire before it could be put out—and saying loudly, "Got to save this corral! An' shed! Keep the fire away from it!"

That was, after all, the sensible thing to do; and though Red might possibly have scattered and extinguished the hay, still he

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did work hard to save the corral, which might have burned. The men stood about watching. Others came. There was no doubt as to how it started. The blacksmith cursed a blue streak: it was his corral and his hay. In the windless night the flames shot high, tossing sparks and lighting up the town with a brief glare. The horses whinnied and surged to the farthest side of the corral.

"It's all spoiled, anyhow. So you'd better scatter it—burn it up. If a wind comes an' does the scatterin', the corral may go!" said Strodd.

"Whatever you folks say," Red answered. "I done it. An' I'll pay."

"Twenty dollars I paid to have some Mexicans cut me that grass!" said the blacksmith.

"I'll buy at that figger," said Red. "So now I'm burnin' my own hay! Quite some expensive cigarette I smoked!"

They thought that he was taking the blame like a man. He felt almost like a hypocrite at having tricked them into unsuspiciously watching the signal fire that was to bring Powell and his riders storming through the town; but he knew that if he had started a fire otherwise than right out openly they might have smelled more than smoke.

Some men who had nothing else to do, idled about for a while, watching; and Red scattered the hay as fast as he could, wanting to be through with the job. He was thirsty, hungry, blackened and singed; and at last he pitched the fork aside, saying, "I call that enough. An' I think from now on I'll break a match stick before I drop it."

SUPPER was long over, but they told him that the restaurant had saved some grub for him. He went into Mike's where most of the men had gathered and were standing about or starting poker games.

Red drank a bottle of beer and looked around:

"Where's Mr. Robbins?"

"Him an' Strodd an' Wiggins are over to Chuck's house, havin' a pow-wow. Why?"

"I just wanted to ask if he thought I'd maybe learnt a lesson. That's all. Now I'll go wash up some an' eat."

He borrowed a lantern from the restaurant, got a bucket of water, stripped to the waist, and as he spluttered and splashed over the wash-bench he hummed soft and low:

"An' she said, 'Sir, yo're a man I hate,
Yore eyes is crooked an' yore nose ain't straight,
You got bow-legs an' yore feet they smell,
But I'll marry you—when it snows in Hell,
F'r I'm a lady, you dang galoot!'

Yessir," Red told himself, "I'm feelin' plumb some relieved. That's been botherin' me ever since before I hit town. It's been more'n an hour ago that I started that fire. They can't be more'n ten mile off, if so far. May have to come slow, down outa them hills. Maybe plans has been changed an' they won't come. Hmm. I done what I was told to do. Gee gosh, I just thought ——An' say! I take my hat off to Mister Bill Powell. He sure knows how to find out what other fellows is up to—he knowed o' this here meetin' a week ago. Well then, ain't it funny he knows so danged little about what goes on under his nose? An' who's ever goin' to have the spunk to tell 'im about Buddy? I ain't no hero! An' Cliff Hammon seemed to have had his fingers into a lot o' pies. I'm sure lucky that-away. An' ol' Wiggins said he onct run Leon Lenard outa this country! I oughta called him a liar. Lotta things I oughta do that I ain't goin' to do. Yessir. If Mister Walt Wiggins wants to say he made Leon Lenard climb a grease'-pole an' set up there all night, I'm a-goin' to listen respectful. But I'd like to be listenin' if Leon hears 'im say it! Now let's eat!"

Having eaten, Red was not happy. A mean and sneaking feeling had come over him. Now that he had sucessfully done his part of the job, he began to think that it had not been a real man's job. He had carefully pretended not to be a friend—more than just a sociable stranger—with any of the men; and he did not greatly like any of them, except for some warmth

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of liking toward Big Mike. But Red felt that all of them had treated him squarely enough. And now he could not bring himself to go in among them, where he was sure to be asked to drink and play some poker, when any minute his own friends might come a-romping in for to hand out tickets to hell.

"I don't like bein' a hypercritter!" he told himself as he walked out into the starlit darkness, trying to think, and listening carefully for the first faint pulse-beat of far-off hoofs. It was nervous work, just waiting.

He went round to the back of the restaurant and slipped to the bunk where he had been sleeping since he had come to town. He got his rifle and went down to the corral. His saddle was there, under the *ramada.* He saddled Blackie and led him out and around to the far side of the corral. Then he went around near the *ramada* and settled himself in the shadows, watching and listening. Up the street a blaze of light fell through the saloon doorway. Over at the house of Chuck, the blacksmith, he could see the lighted windows where old George Robbins, Pete Strodd, and Walt Wiggins discussed plans for running Bill Powell clear off the earth.

HE ROSE to his feet listening, for far off, very far off, he heard the faint, muffled drum-like tattoo of horsemen. But he couldn't place the sound, and though he climbed the corral and peered across the shadow-blotted valley, he saw nothing. Sounds carry a long way in the night silence. Then the hoof-beats died away, and he could not hear them longer. "They've pulled down. My gosh, are they goin' to *walk* into this man's town!"

He stayed on the corral fence, watching. A coyote yelped as if in pain, and now and then an owl flew by like a sluggish shadow. The strain of hard peering made shadows seem to move like creeping things. He seemed to hear the distant click of hoofs on pebbles, and he faced about, staring toward the arroyo below the town, and in a few minutes saw the dim form of riders come slowly up the bank and into the starlight. He started to get off the fence when the slow, dust-muffled *cloof-cloof* of other horsemen drew his eyes along the road. Some were coming that way too. Were these last Powell's men, or other fellows riding in?

"I'm seein' things—or rather ain't seein' 'em! I can't make out more'n half dozen men, all told! Three down yonder! Three on the road—but there's a couple of fellows laggin'. Why'd they be laggin'? Oh, but way 'cross there, too! They're comin' in from every side! An' walkin'! But there ain't more than ten to a dozen, all told—holy jumped-up cat-fish! This is goin' to be purty!"

Red went for his horse, and struck off at a slow trot toward the road where the nearest riders were coming forward at a bobbing canter—with the two laggers following. A quarter of a mile out of the town he was stopped with a low, clear, sharp, "Halt!"

Red pulled up with, "You guessed right. I sure will!"

"That you, Red?" It was Powell's voice.

"Me!"

Powell rode up, with Leon Lenard on one side of him and Johnny Howard on the other. Leon Lenard was tall in the saddle, and straight as if he had a brand-new ramrod stuck into his backbone. He crowded his horse up close to Red, but did not say a word or make a move. He just took care to be where he might hear every word and perhaps because he was a distrustful old fellow, might scan Red's face and see if he could tell whether or not Red had got into a jam, or had told of Powell's plans and then lighted the fire in order to bring Powell and his men into a trap. No lone killer wolf of the hills was more wary than Leon Lenard, this old outlaw who had never been caught.

Johnny Howard, in the low, eager voice of one who didn't expect an answer just then, murmured, "'Lo, Red!" Powell, face to face, and almost shoulder to

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shoulder, said sharply, "You've done well. Now who's in town? An' where?"

"Seven or eight fellows was here already. Then Pete Strodd come in with two more; Walt Wiggins an' another; ol' George Robbins an' a half-dozen. Most of 'em are over to the saloon; but Robbins, Strodd an'——" Red broke off in a flame of curses.

The two laggers had come up. One was Buddy Powell, the other Pincher.

Over his leveled finger, Red demanded, "What's that skunk doin' back here!"

"Met him on the road," said Powell. "He said he suspicioned you was my man. Said he helped you play the game an'——"

"Mister Powell, I'm doin' a fool thing. I'm wearin' my guns cocked—same as I seen ol' George Robbins wears his. The first shot that goes out of 'em is goin' into that snake's tooth, if he's anywhere near! That's facts, an'——"

"Why'd you shoot Diego?" Powell snapped.

Red's lips trembled to blurt the truth, but this was no time—and he knew in his heart that there would never be a time—when he could tell Powell what he had learned of Buddy; so he said, "I met 'im on the road 'cross there. He mistook me for a Robbins' man, an' said as how he's brought a warnin' that the stranger who'd come in off the Basin was a red-headed Powell spy. I took my hat off an' let 'im see what a mistake he'd made. Then he made another one. Tried to shoot me."

"Who in Hell could have sent him? I know now that Cliff Hammon was—but Cliff is dead. Where's Robbins an' them?"

Red shook his head and pointed again at Pincher.

"I know 'im!" said Powell. "But he's told me things an'——"

"You'd trust what a man you've quirted says?" Red snapped, and in the starlight Pincher's dark face writhed as if the pain and the shame of the quirting had come back.

"Red is right!" said Buddy Powell, smoothly and with emphasis. "I'll stay and guard him, Dad. No time to waste!"

The groan Red smothered down almost broke his belt. He squirmed as if struggling against a rope that tied his hands. One side-winder watching another!

"Johnny," said Powell. "Ride up through town, slow. Tell Mack where we're stoppin'. Tell 'im to go ahead as planned, an' round 'em up in that saloon. Ride slow!"

"An' Johnny," said Red. "Tell the boys to go easy as they can on Mike hisself. He's a Robbins man till hell freezes, but he's——"

"Y'see, Mister Powell," said Pincher with a squawky whine, "how he sticks up for your enemies!"

They rode on. Red's teeth were clamped. He glanced backwards. Buddy and Pincher sat saddle to saddle. Buddy had got himself left where there wouldn't be much smoke, and Pincher was safely snugged down in friendly hands.

"Mister Powell," said Red in a low tone. "Me, I was hired till you won your fight. If tonight does it, I'm done. You can keep my wages. I got some of your spendin' money left. I'm clear plumb through—if you win."

"Why?"

"Pincher. I wouldn't stay in Heaven if he sneaked in."

"It was Pincher who sent me word a week ago of this here meetin', Red. I didn't trust 'im. That's why I sent you in. Pincher'd sell himself ten times in an hour. But when you've got an uphill fight you catch holt of anything that helps. If he'd knowed I was comin', he'd have sold me out. But just the same, I'll pay him spot cash for what he told. He sneaked me a letter that Robbins had sent to that Mike. He'd sell the gold fillin' out of his dyin' mother's teeth—an' me, I reckon I'd buy it if—I had to have something for to make a bullet!" Then, "Johnny, ride on—like I told you. Red, me an' Leon is stoppin' here at Chuck's house. Do you wanta come along an' listen?"

"My ears'll be stretched out like a drift fence!"

Chapter XV

Covered with Blood and Glory

NOTHING that he knew of Powell had made Red feel so admiring as the iron-nerved caution with which

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Powell walked his horses and made his men walk theirs into this town. If they had sneaked in, creeping about on foot, Red would have felt different, but just to ride calmly and slowly, so as not to scatter an alarm, that took cold nerve. He had expected them to come in tearing up the earth and shooting. But this was cold, calm work; just cautious, not sneaking. And it meant a showdown. Up the street he could see men on horseback, riding slowly. Others stood off to check those who might try to break through.

"An' these fellows think Powell ain't got men that'll back 'im up!" said Red to himself.

"Now quiet!" said Powell as they stopped before Chuck's house.

They slid from their horses, letting the reins fall. Red shook himself, settling his holsters, touching the gun butts. Powell strode forward, walking light-footed. His spurs tinkled faintly. Leon Lenard was beside him, half a step behind. Red followed on tiptoes, holding his breath with the thought, "It's sure goin' be purty!" drumming through his head.

The hum and crackle of voices from within reached them. Without a pause, Powell flung open the door and stepped through, hands at his side and head up with a hawk-faced scowl on the four men half sprawled about the table. Leon Lenard edged through then took two side-steps that put him off to the left of Powell, with his back to the wall. Red crowded in and stood to the right.

The men at the table stiffened into an attitude of astonished awkwardness. Had the devil himself, horned and cloven-hoofed, walked in, they couldn't have been more astounded. Their eyes were blown wide by utter amazement, but Red's being there seemed an explanation.

A bottle of whisky was on the table, and glasses, a lamp and cigars, with chewed butts about the floor. Robbins held a pencil and had been leaning forward over a roughly drawn sketch parceling out the T T ranges throughout Lelargo County. He lifted his head with a startled jerk, and sat motionless with elbow still on the table, pencil between his fingers. Strodd, with elbow half raised in frozen gesture as if to ward off a blow from his face, gazed with mouth open. The fourth man, a Robbins' foreman, had leaned back in the stiff frightened posture of one who sees a snake's head near his face. Only Walt Wiggins had moved. He simply arose, kicking over the chair behind him, and stood half crouched, with his arms hanging rigidly, palms backwards.

They waited, staring, with no word spoken, until Powell, with long and heavy-footed stride, walked right up to the table. He looked down at the map-sketch, reached out, crumpled it between his fingers, and flinging the crumpled paper across the table to the floor, said, "Up, Robbins! Fight it out!"

LEON LENARD, with a noiseless slithering of his long legs, and but the faintest tinkle of spur rowels, went near, facing Wiggins. At that Red, with hasty and stumbling clatter of heel and spurs, went closer too; he wanted it known by everybody present that he was in this, neck-deep and that he would stick even though the cold strain of it was unlike anything he had ever seen before. For a man no older than he was, he had seen a lot of shooting. But most of it had been with quick, hot words and the sudden flash of guns. This was the steel-nerved play of veteran killers, each silently jockeying for the split-second jump that meant sure death with the first bullet.

"Bill Powell," said Robbins, and without movement of his arm he tossed the pencil from his fingers, "this here's poker. Cows for chips, range for table—an' you win!"

"Bah!" said Powell.

"Yes sir, that redhead hornswoggled us right—with his little fire. Sort of a sneakin' way to make a fight, ain't it?"

"I think so," said Powell, coldly calm and watchful. And making a good point, even if the statement wasn't entirely accurate, he added, "That's why I sent in here the man who'd killed *your* Cliff Hammon!"

Old Robbins' head went up as if struck on the chin. Powell seemed to have all trumps. Robbins flipped his hands helplessly, and let them lie palms up. He was stalling for time and a chance at that split-

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second jump, and he knew that Powell knew it; there was no other way to play the game, and so he gazed at Powell, saying nothing.

Then Leon Lenard spoke, calm and low, with his slit eyes widened just a little to show the gleam that flickered there like a bit of lightning; and if ice had been melting in his mouth, his tone couldn't have been more cold, "Now that we've begun to talk, I'll speak, Walt Wiggins. I hear you've told more'n once that you once run me out o' this country. The same bein' in a way truth. You pretended to be my friend, then you sent a bunch of men up to catch me— an' I run. The world's too full of dirty dogs for me to go huntin' every one that needs killin', but when I meet up with one like yoreself——"

Lenard stopped, and his right arm, palm back, began that slow away-from-the-body, backward reach, as if he had rheumatism in his shoulder. Wiggins, with a flash of hands and a jerk that sent him into a forward crouch, whipped both his guns forward with thumbs on hammers. There was an explosive roar, and Wiggins pitched forward with both guns blazing into the floor at Lenard's feet. Lenard's slow right hand had settled as if resting on the low-slung gun's butt that was still in the holster; but his *left* hand, with the winking flash of trained, wiry sinews, had pitched its gun hip-high and had smashed lead into the heart of the old killer who never in his life had been beaten before on the draw.

Lenard's gun, held motionless, smoked over the holster and his long, lean left thumb reached up and snapped back the hammer. "Pete Strodd, you're next," he said. "Since you won't draw, stand up an' take it! You folks was aimin' for to kill Mister Powell here, any old how you could; an' I ain't one to let mad dogs live, just 'cause they won't bite at *me!*"

"My God—my God, Leon! You won't—me—shoot—shoot like this!" Strodd gasped.

"I sure as hell will, if you fellows don't get up on your feet an' fight it out. Now take your chance!"

With that Leon moved the gun in front of him, and with his eyes on Strodd, but using both his hands, he carefully let down the hammer. Then he slowly put the gun back into its holster and put his hands waist-high in front of him, touching together the tips of his fingers. He stood straight and motionless, waiting.

At that moment shooting broke out up the street, with yells, the flying scurry of hoofs and *crackety-crack-crack* of forty-fives going like brazen-throated geese; and a moment or two later began the louder and slower explosive *whang* of rifles, with far-off curses and shrill yips. The hub-bub was like a bunch of fire-crackers going off in a tin wash boiler, with an Indian war dance thrown in. There were iron shod hoof-beats of frantic horses, ridden by madmen; yells; the calling of orders, and the questioning cry of names to make sure of friends. Men rode by with thunder-clap of hoofs, other men following; and stabs of flame winked back and forth between them.

Then old George Robbins, who had drawn his palms back to the edge of the table, with a hoarse cry of "Get 'em!" threw over the table, lamp and all, with a mighty fling as he dropped knees down to the floor. Strodd, with a wild leap aside, put his back to the side wall, and Robbins' foreman sprawled forward in a low duck to the floor. The lamp was struck; its body was metal, but the chimney broke into the tinkling rattle of a hundred pieces, and the smoking wick thrust up a yellow wisp of light and died. The overturned table had struck Powell's legs, knocking him into a kind of stumbling jump backwards, so that with a stagger he reeled aside. Then dagger-pointed flames laced the darkness, and the deafening burst of guns at close quarters between walls stunned the ears. Smoke, heavy with powder smell stung throat and eyes.

Red, with one knee to the dirt floor and head drawn down into his hunched shoulders, fired both his guns at once, then top-

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pled as if hit—dodging bullets in the dark. Again he fired and lurched aside, coolly counting his shots; and by the winking blaze he caught a glimpse of old Leon Lenard, still tall and straight, guns out at half arm's length, coldly taking any man's fire for the chance to snap back. That made Red feel a little ashamed of his wallowing antics, meant protectively; and so he got to his feet.

After this first twenty seconds—it could scarcely have been longer—of deafening flurry and half-blinding lightning winks, the shooting stopped. For a moment the silence seemed like a great loneliness to Red, and he wondered if he alone lived, though some man groaned in a far corner. Red stirred, then called softly, "Mister Powell——" and at the sound of his voice, flame winked quick as a knife-thrust in the dark, and was answered, not by Red who hadn't expected it, but from across the room, by Leon, who still stood waiting, cool, wary and watchful.

"Thanks!" Red called.

"Shut up!" said Leon.

Minutes seemed to drag by, but they were seconds; then Powell's heavy voice spoke from almost the center of the room. "I think it's over, Leon!"

And a nervous, eager, boyish voice shrieked from the doorway, "An' a hell of a way to treat me! I been settin' here scairt to shoot for fear I'd hit one of you fellers!" Johnny broke off into curses that would have shamed the tongue of a mule-skinner. The next moment he was inside the room, scratching matches.

All the enemy were dead except Robbins' foreman, and he was dying.

"Hurt, Leon?" Powell asked.

"Nipped in the leg. But I picked myself up an' leaned against the wall."

"You, Red?" Mr. Powell called.

"Not as I know of!"

Then a howl went up from Johnny, who was bending over under his lighted matches: "Ow! Mister Powell's all shot to pieces an' dyin'—covered—blood——ow——!"

"Shut up!" Powell pushed at him. "I'm hit, yes. But this here is ol' Robbins' blood. I jumped on 'im to make sure I couldn't miss!"

Red's knees seemed to waver, now that it was all over, and he fanned with a nervous hand at the smoke before his face, then he said almost humbly, "I thought I'd seen a little something in my time, here an' there. But I might as well've been blind! I never seen nothin'—nothin' like this! An' if I ever do again, I won't be red-headed no more. I'll have gray hairs all over me!"

And old Leon Lenard, from against the wall, where he stood on one leg, said calmly, "All the gray hairs you ever get won't disgrace nobody!"

Just then old Mack and some of the other T T boys came on the run, carrying a lantern. They crowded through the door, sniffing and coughing at the smoke, and asking anxious questions as Mack stepped forward holding the lantern aloft. Old Bill Powell, with his right arm hanging loose and a sort of a sidling twist to his body, swept Mack aside with his left hand and stood before Red with his left hand out.

"Son," he said, "while I got me a cow left, you can allus eat beef steak!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE SHERIFF OF TAHZO AGAIN

MOST of the rest of the night, and until well after sunup, was spent in riding to look for saddled horses with reins trailing that had scattered in the panic of wild shooting and the surging stampede-like clatter of the fight. Somebody brought Blackie in with both reins snapped short; he had stepped on them and jerked them off. Red promptly took the reins off another horse, then he unsaddled Blackie, gave him a drink and some oats from Chuck's barrel, and put him back into the corral with a long and fluent cussing for disgracing of himself by running.

Blackie laid back his ears and seemed to scowl, so Red apologized, "I reckon you're right! If you hosses was a-shootin' an' a-cussin', an' me standin' with a bridle in my mouth—I'd run too. Further'n you did!"

Powell of the T T had once again proved to all who took part in the fight, as well as to all the hopefully jealous cattle-

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men who awaited news from their hilltops on the range, that he was still the king cowman of Lelargo, and that if anybody wanted any of his range it was a lot cheaper and safer to buy it.

Many men were dead, including some of his own, for the crowd that had been rounded up in Mike's saloon were mostly true hard fighting men, down on the Robbins-Strodd-Wiggins payrolls at from forty to sixty dollars per month—top wages those days!—and they broke through doors and windows, being too proud to lay down unless over-weighted with lead.

Those that now a second time had been rounded up, some badly hurt, were brought back to the saloon for safe keeping; and as they lay about on the floor or propped themselves against the wall, the T T men squatted in front of them, passing back and forth tobacco and papers, some beer and a little whisky with water for such as wanted it. As they talked together they seemed like a badly shaken lot of bronco busters after a hard-riding contest. They had been hired to ride and fight for Robbins, Strodd and Wiggins; and Robins, Strodd and Wiggins being dead, the fight was now over. Most of them were strangers to the TT riders, so there were no personal hard feelings; and nobody was at all surprised when Mr. Powell, with his right arm in a sling, walked in with solid stride and swept them with hawk-like eyes, saying, "You that give me your word that you're all through, can go. Some breakfast is bein' cooked. Eat it an' ride. You that can't will be took care of, same as my men." Then, to the big saloon keeper, "An' you' Mike, you was a good friend to old George. A good friend is a good man, allus. Old George he overplayed his hand. For all o' me or my men, you can set right here, the same as allus."

"Thankee, Mister Powell; but me, I'll pull my freight. Ol' George done me some favors in my time. That redhead o' yourn sure put one over on us. I don't exactly want to put my arms round his neck an' hug 'im; but I ain't got no particular hard feelin's. Him an' his matches! But one thing I would like to know. Why in hell did he shoot Diego?"

"Diego was a-ridin' in for to tell you boys to look out for Red, who was here spyin'. Met Red, an' thought he was one o' you boys, an' so spilled the beans. I'd give the only good arm I got left to know who sent 'im. You couldn't give me no symptom of information?"

"Nossir, it happens I can't. Prob'bly wouldn't anyhow. If old George had listened to me, he wouldn't've listened to Strodd an' Wiggins. But it's all in the cards."

When Powell had been gone some little time, Pincher strutted in. There were no powder burns on his clothes. During most of the fight he had been on the inside of the corral.

"Well, you big slob," he said to Mike. "Put one over on you, didn't I? 'Twas me that sent Mister Powell word o' this here meetin'!"

Mike reached out a big arm to get a hold on Pincher's neck, but Pincher jumped back, pulling at a gun. He drew it, and backed the unarmed saloonkeeper to the bar, talked big and hot, reviewing old grievances and men looked on a bit uneasy.

Then a voice came through the doorway, "Turn around, you——"

Pincher turned, hastily lowering his gun. He knew that voice. Red wasn't grinning, and his arms were loose at his side. Pincher stared wildly for a moment; he, with drawn gun in hand, almost daring to risk it—yet he was scared stiff. Overnight he had heard a lot about this redhead, and thought him a killer like Walt Wiggins, or old Leon Lenard.

"Drop it or use it!" said Red, with hands still empty.

Pincher whimpered, "The time's comin' —sooner'n you think— I——" The gun fell to the floor from fingers that trembled.

Men booed Pincher, who crept off, leaving his gun. He passed Red at the doorway without a word, and went away, hot-eyed and boiling with sour wishes, to

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find his friend Buddy Powell. It seemed to Pincher that he just didn't have any luck at all. He felt himself as good a man as the next, and ready for any old thing; but somehow folks weren't friendly, and he felt misunderstood and badly abused.

When Pincher had passed him, Red walked in and stopped before Mike, then pointed at Pincher's gun. "Want yourself a nice souvenir, Mike?"

"I'll have me a souvenir," said Mike calmly, "ever' time I look at a burnt match. You done it clever. An' that little devil Johnny Howard put you through the Basin? Hum. Even if mine is the same color, the next redhead I see, I'm goin' set off an' stay suspicious! You done it clever. Asked no questions an' wouldn't answer none. Most fellows would've over-explained how they come to be here. I don't wish you too much bad luck. So listen. Pincher's right smart of a good shot with a rifle. He figgers it's safer. *Savvy?*"

"Thanks," said Red, and put out his hand.

"No. No. Can't do that," Mike replied, with steady glance and level tone. "I'll never lift a hand or say a word 'gainst you for what's happened in this here town. But I got sentiments. An' old George Robbins was my friend."

RED went into the restaurant to have a talk with Leon Lenard. The old outlaw sat with his leg in splints of split pine resting in a chair, and there was a pile of ham, flapjacks, potatoes, dried apples, and coffee on the table. Leon was usually a surly cuss and gave welcome to but few persons who came near him with sociable intentions—Mr. Powell, of course, and old Mack, with a bit of tolerance for the hair-brained Johnny.

He looked up at Red across a forkful of potatoes and said, "Set."

"Gosh, I couldn't swaller nothin' but coffee."

"Mmm," said Leon. "'Tother way with me. I don't eat beforehand."

"Leg troublin' you much?"

"Nothin's troublin' me, Boy, except——" He looked cautiously about. No one was near. But Leon did not finish, except with a nod that held much meaning.

Red answered with a nod.

"What you learnt?" Leon asked, laying down his fork and fixing those gleaming slits of eyes on Red.

"I don't know that I've *learnt* anything. I heard a lot before Diego fell off his horse. He was talkin' for his life, an' he may have lied. It was this-away——"

Now and then as Red spoke Leon took up a forkful and chewed slowly, sometimes looking into space, sometimes at his plate, now and then running a hand down along his injured leg, and again and again flashing his eyes at Red as if to surprise any secret look that might be on his face. But that was just a habit of Leon's. This time he had no suspicions at all of Red; and when Red had told it all, Leon calmly continued to eat in silence.

Red fidgetted, rolled cigarettes and threw them away half smoked, waiting; and at last, unable to wait longer, he asked, "Well?"

"Well what?"

"What's to be done now, Mister Lenard."

Leon Lenard put down his fork, and fastening those deadly eyes on Red, held him with a half-minute's look and at last said softly, "I'll do it."

A sort of chill went through Red. He knew it all with only three words spoken. Leon had passed the sentence of death on Buddy Powell. Somewhere, somehow, unknown to other men, they would meet; a word or two to let the miserable wretch know justice was striking, a shot from a gun that could not miss—and men would say that some of Robbins' or Strodd's or Wiggins' cowmen had done it. The gentle girl that somehow had got down inside the lonely heart of Leon Lenard and warmed it as with a daughter's love, would be avenged; and Old Bill Powell would never know the shame that lay hidden in his son's grave.

Red's thoughts swirled in a dizzying protest; and for a time he sat dumb, then stuttered hesitatingly. But at last his thoughts laid hold on the words he wanted an they came with blurting vehemence, "My God, no! That boy they hung—Tom Terry—he's got folks!—— They curse

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his name an' hate themselves for having blood of his. They'll allus think—I once was near hung, too—an' I got folks—— *Just think if that hanged boy was your son, an' you'd never know he wasn't really guilty!* No!—— No!—— He's got to die out in the open, so folks'll know why. This has to be done honest! Though if it wasn't for Tom Terry's folks—— My God, Leon, I can't forget that time I was near hung—an' you, you've got to think of what you'd feel if Tom Terry was your son! I'm sorry for Mister Powell—you know I am! —But by the living God, I'll fight to see that the right thing is done!"

Old Leon Lenard put down both knife and fork noiselessly, and half-turned in his chair fixing his slit eyes, all agleam with steady light, on Red. He looked at him, and kept on looking, as motionless as if turned to stone with only his eyes alive. The old outlaw had turned his thoughts inward; he brooded. He was not angry with Red. He knew that this boy was honest and that he had courage. Leon Lenard was turning over and over in his thoughts what Red had said, and at last he pushed his plate away with his breakfast not half finished. Dropping his eyes to the dirt floor, he said, "Have it your way. I reckon, all-in-all, you're right. I know Tom Terry's folks. I hadn't much thought of them before." He lifted his eyes. "Too damn bad Mister Powell never had a boy like you."

"Aw hell, my Dad's to blame—I mean the other way round! He just naturally licked the tar out of me any time he ever even half-way suspicioned I wasn't doin' right. Till the fact is, now I just can't be comfortable unless I think I am doin' right. I feel all sick an' sneakin', sort o' measly, if I don't. I got no gumption at all if I think maybe—don't you see? I'm just no good at all unless I feel I'm doin' like I oughta. It's somethin' I can't help—a sort o' weakness. I'm tellin' you the truth!"

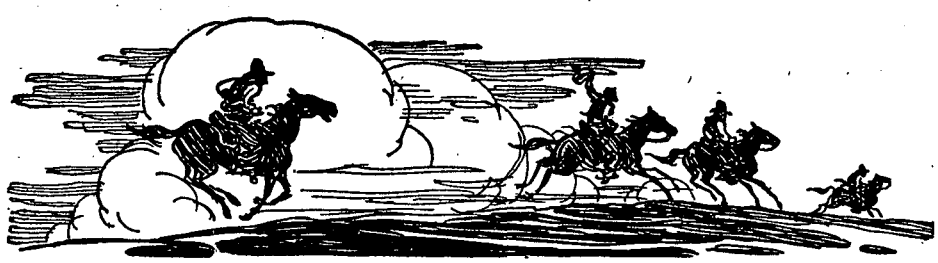
Leon Lenard smiled faintly, nodded just a little, and murmured, "I know. Some day you're goin' to be a sheriff. An' a good one, too. When you are, maybe you'll remember me." The smile trembled like the stirring of ripples, widening. "So I'll tell you something few know. I've got a pardon. Signed by a man who was President some years ago. So some folks think I ain't all bad. Which maybe shows how folks can be mistook."

Again there was silence between them. Leon shifted his wounded leg a little, and sat brooding; then he looked up and asked, "Just what are you goin' do about Buddy?"

"I don't know—yet," answered Red. "Somehow snake 'im across into Tahzo County, I guess. There's the girl's brother. But he's bad hurt. His friend Wilkins might help. Maybe I won't need no help. Once over there, there's Valdez. The sheriff was holdin' Valdez when that paymaster was killed. So what Valdez says'll be listened to. An' when the sheriff of Tahzo gets his hands on that fellow, however it's done, I'm through!"

"Yes?" said Leon quietly. "You saw Old Bill Powell go into action last night? Well, let the sheriff of Tahzo put his hands on that boy, an' Bill Powell will come a-roarin'—an' there ain't men enough in the whole of Tahzo to stop 'im!"

("Red Clark of Tulluco" ends in the next issue of SHORT STORIES.)



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A Texas Ranger Shows the Slick City Gunmen How to Make a Fast Draw

THE SWEDISH RAP

By KERRY RALSTON

Author of "Drums of Fortune," "A Pilot and a Passenger," etc.

IT MAY be that I didn't recognize that first bullet when it went *sput* into a pile about three feet from my thinking machinery. I am ordinarily a very peaceful, home loving individual and I do not study bullets. But when a second one went *splap* against the iron side of Number Two barge, I knew what that was all right! I can only say that when the third bullet arrived I had departed.

Meanwhile Jack Ruyder, who was up on the elevator platform, at the time, operating the sand scoop, had shut off the belt hoist and hung his head over the rail.

"Hey, Virge," he calls down. "Did you know somebody was shooting?"

I let out a yell for him to get under cover and skated across the plank to the dredge, which was tied up there at the time, waiting for the tug. Willie Hobbs, the engineer, had been standing on the river side in the engine room doorway at the first shot, but now all I could hear of Willie was a rattling of some cans and a scraping noise, whereby I knew that Willie was doing some burrowing.

A couple of more shots boomed across the river.

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"I can see 'em from up here," Jack called down, hanging one eye over the rail of the elevator platform. "Two automobiles and six men. They've got some kind of a target set up—an' we're gettin' the benefit of all their misses."

This is a pretty deserted spot on the river and not much happens except on Sunday when crowds from the city come out to the beaches and several people are occasionally drowned. On weekdays it is as good a place to practice as any, but I can see right away that, if we are on a line with their target, it is powerful bad medicine for us—too much so to stand for.

"Give 'em a yell, Jack. Tell 'em to move over one way or the other."

Jack Ruyder accordingly clears his throat and emits a couple of yodels. I don't know whether they heard them or not for just as I look up I see a car coming in our road, and I know that it's Rathbone, the boss.

"Just what is the meaning of this?" snaps Rathbone, giving Jack the mean eye. "What's that fool up there doing? Singing to the crows? Why isn't this dredge up at the bank where she belongs? What's your tonnage today? Get to work!"

"Jack's not singing," I came back at him, getting peeved myself. "Anyway, the pump gaskets are shot to pieces and we've gotta replace them or the leak will sink this old tub. If you'd been here about a minute——"

Bam! came a shot, and the echoes rumbled like thunder. At the same time there is a tinkle of glass and Rathbone's Lizzie now has but one eye.

As for the boss, he jumps three feet straight up and comes down in high! He has one of these changeable faces that shifts from purple to green, and after one look at that smashed headlight his face runs the rainbow.

"I'll get 'em out of there. You guys stay under cover here. Jack, you lie down up there. Keep the boilers between you down here, Sprague. I'll be back in half an hour."

THERE is a bridge about a half a mile below where we lie, and Rathbone had to drive clear down there to get across the river. In about five minutes, however, Jack Ruyder sighted Rathbone's car going up a lane into that meadow across the river, and presently Rathbone got out.

"Well," I called up finally, "what is he doing over there?"

"Nothing," Jack called down. "I thought there was going to be a fight, but there wasn't. They moved peaceable. Nothing to do now but go back to work." He was pretty much disappointed.

It seemed the guys across the river had moved their target downstream. This was O. K. with us, because the tug had to get back and forth upstream, and Joey Small, the engineer on the tug, is a family man.

Rathbone had said he'd be back, but he didn't show up that night, nor the next day either. But he did telephone at six in the evening of that next day.

"Sprague," he said, "that's a bunch of red hots from the city over there across the river. They were peaceful enough when I asked 'em to move their target but they're a pretty tough looking bunch. Tell the boys to stay away from them, that's all. They said they might be out a couple of days a week to practice."

I asked him if he knew them.

"No; but it wouldn't surprise me if they're one of the gangs that are doing all the shooting in town. They wouldn't be doing all this practising if they didn't mean business."

When Rathbone mentioned a lot of shooting in town he said a mouthful. We get the evening paper, and I've kept up on the killings and so on. It wasn't as bad as it used to be before Paddy Coburn and his gang were rounded up by a bunch of garage mechanics one night and all sent to the cooler, but there's two gangs still operating. One is the Cuckoo, and the other is called the River Rats.

Nobody knows why these gangs are allowed to go on, unless it's the Circuit attorney, who is undoubtedly a slick crook. I know he's crooked, because these guys always wiggle out of being convicted. And I know the Circuit Clerk is slick, because nobody can ever prove anything on him.

"Get that gasket in tonight if you can," Rathbone ordered, "and get that dredge back up at the bank tomorrow. Keep them—the boys moving, Sprague."

Rathbone is a pretty good boss to work

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for and I'd like to please him, so I went down and gave Willie Hobbs a red hot cussing which kept him moving for a short while. But Willie is like a checker game —he don't move far and then only in one direction. It was the next morning before we got all the nuts back on the lugs and had steam up again.

BY THIS time we had quit thinking about the shooting across the river. If you have ever seen any sand dredging, you may have noticed how it is done. We're using a fourteen inch intake and twin centrifugal pumps on the dredge boat. We moor alongside of a sandbank, stick the pipe into the drink and start the works. The flow comes up high and out over the side where we have a barge tied in close. The flow pipe has a hood over the end that checks the sand and gravel and drops it into the barge while the water shoots on over the side.

When the barge is full our tug, the *Josephine Maguire* brings in an empty and boosts the loaded one on down to the hoist where we scoop it out with a jawl-shovel onto a belt conveyer which moves it up into a hopper from which there are screens to separate the sand from the gravel before we drop it into cars. On a good day we'll run three barges, these being a hundred and twenty feet long and forty feet abeam, with a 500 capacity wet. Since river sand sells at $1.90 a ton retail you can see how it is that Rathbone can pay a crew of seven men and still take his afternoons off to play golf.

II

IT WAS eight o'clock in the morning, the second morning after the shooting, when Rathbone flivvers out of a dust cloud and alights under the hopper with a motion for me to come down.

"Brought you another man," he says, looking at me in a half silly way. As he speaks, a big sunburned bozo wriggles out without bothering to open the door. As nearly as I can judge he was about six feet three sockless, and one look at the hams he calls hands is plenty. I'm a foreman, but I'm not soft. Nevertheles if this bird ever squeezed down on you, why you'd just naturally lay off a while for repairs.

"This is Virge Sprague, foreman of my dredge outfit here," Rathbone introduced me. "Sprague, this is Hans Larsen. Put him on and let me know how he gets along."

Larsen grinned from ear to ear. His voice was one surprise.

"Ay ban pleased!" he cooed, in excellent Swedish. I guess it was Swedish. I've only known two Swedes, and the other's name was Lidquist. Anyway, Larsen talked just like Lidquist.

"I wasn't exactly needing any additions," I told Rathbone. "I'd have let you know if I was short. However——"

"Friend of mine asked me to give him a job," explained Rathbone, giving me a dirty look. "Here's his application blank. File it with the others." He handed me an envelope with my name on the outside.

This struck me as queer, because Rathbone usually keeps everything on file in his own office up at Castlebank. Acting on a hunch, I put the envelope in my pocket unopened, showed Larsen the busines end of a shovel and how to trip the hopper, also initiated him into how to pinch a gondola out from under the chute to spread the load. With wet sand this has to be done, as wet sand doesn't flatten.

One thing I was sure of, maily that Larson's application was not in the envelope given to me by Rathbone. Ruyder was hanging around within hearing at the time, and Rathbone occasionally has business which is nobody's business but his and mine.

When the boss had left I toddled into my bunkroom to see what was in the note. The letter read:

This man is to be given every consideration. If by chance he would like to take two hours for lunch I have no objections. He is not to be held to any definite schedule. If he seems to have queer ideas, humor him. Don't interfere with anything he wants to do within reason. Don't say anything about him or ball him out before the others. I may explain later.

WHEN I had read this over three times the best I could think of to say was "Hell's gongs!"

How was a man going to keep discipline

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among a crew with this guy loafing on the job? These bozos are lazy enough anyway. If this bird wants to spend a vacation somewhere, why wish him on me and then *pay* him for it?

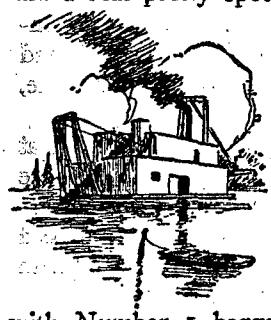
Something else occurred to me. Was Larsen sent by the main office to watch me, or to watch Rathbone? Or was Rathbone setting him to spy on me?

Knowing Rathbone pretty well, I knew that he wouldn't do a thing like that. Rathbone is four-square all right, outside of laughing at you when you ask him for a raise.

Anyway I looked at it, it didn't make sense.

By and by I crept out for another look at Larsen. He looked bigger than ever. The way he handled that shovel was plenty amusing, but he seemed to move a lot of drip.

Across the river everything was quiet and restful with the cottonwood flying and coating the river with white fuzz. The stream right here is only two hundred feet across and a real pretty spot with big limestone palisade bluffs rearing in the background to the north. Up the other way I could hear the faint puff of the dredge, and pretty soon the *Josephine Maguire* puffed into sight with Number 1 barge, coming slow and easy, which reminded me of a real pretty old song called, "Steamboat Coming 'Round the Bend."



Nevertheless, I began to have an uneasy, jumpy feeling, as though something was coming around the bend besides the old *Josephine Maguire*. I had a feeling that I didn't understand all I knew about this, and that something was going to slip up on me and happen. It's an uncomfortable feeling.

RUYDER and I walked up to town for lunch, leaving the Swede to eat some sandwiches which he'd brought along. After a good meal and a little josh with the waitress at the hotel I felt a lot better.

There was a morning paper lying on the cigar counter and I happened to glance at the front page. There was a big headline clear across the top which said:

PATROLMAN KILLED BY LAUNDRY BANDIT IN DARING HOLD-UP

Underneath I caught the words: "Two Cuckoo Gangster Suspects Held."

Ruyder was already outside and we only had five minutes to get back to the spur, so I could not tarry to read the rest of it. I only wondered if by chance some of those birds who had been practising on us had bumped off this poor copper. This was the second copper to get killed in two weeks.

Turning into the road we stopped to fill a couple of jugs from a well which we'd sunk up there a little farther away from the river so as to get something besides seep, and here I noticed wagon tracks in and out.

As far as I could remember we had not ordered anything that would be delivered by wagon. Some farmer might have driven in there, but generally the farm hands don't mix much with the dredging crews, as the farmers all think we are a tough bunch of bozos. This is not true, but we let them think that to keep them from standing around.

Right soon I saw that there was a pile of lumber lying right alongside of the bunkhouse! And right on top of that new lumber that Swede Hans Larsen was sitting!

Larsen had that wide grin of his prominently displayed as we walked up, and Ruyder grins back in a friendly way. As for me, I can't grin so well when I'm thinking so hard.

If I asked what was this lumber for, Ruyder would wonder whether I was sliping and soon about to retire as foreman of Dredge Number Four. I had to make up something quick, so I took a long chance. The Swede evidently knew what that lumber was there for.

"Well, Larsen," I said, "I see your boards came. You can get to work now any time you like."

The Swede got up, grinning some more. "Haf you got wan sa-aw, eh?"

"Saw? What do you want? Cross or rip?"

"Ay tink Ay tak the cross."

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"In the tool chest, under my bunk. And be sure you put it back."

Larsen trotted off, with Ruyder looking after him dubiously.

"What's the big idea, Virge?"

"I think the main office wants some shafts sunk down below," I ventured, hitting upon the only thing I could think of where lumber would be used just at this time.

"Shafts! Then what do they want to buy *finished white pine lumber* for? That looks more like mill work than siding for a test shaft. Besides they sank a couple of shafts down there this spring and found nothing but loam clean below level."

ALL of a sudden it came to me how to fix everything in regards to Larsen. I put on a wise, knowing look, and pulled Ruyder to the side out of Larsen's hearing.

"Listen, Jack," I said. "I'm going to give you a hot tip. I'm not supposed to know it, but Rathbone told me on the side that this dumb Swede is only about half as dumb as he acts. In reality he's out here for the main office to watch how we work. Maybe they ain't satisfied with our tonnage, or maybe there's just a new broom or two in the main office that have got to act like they're whoopin' things up. The big idea is to not let Larsen suspect that we know. Treat him cordial, Jack, and pass the word on to the boys to act likewise. It may mean our bread and butter. Savvy?"

Now I was pretty sure that this was not the case at all, but it worked O. K. with Ruyder. He looked kind of startled and thoughtful as he went up the ladder to his roost.

A moment afterward Willie Potts jerked the whistle cord on the *Josephine,* lying up at the dredge at the time. This was the signal that the afternoon had begun.

The echoes of the whistle were still bouncing off the distant cliffs when the Swede lumbered out of the bunkhouse again with the hammer, the saw and a box of nails.

Now I am no weakling myself, but neither do I lift five 12-foot 2x6's with the hammer and saw balanced on top and toddle off into the woods at a nonchalant dog trot, even if white pine is a light wood. This is exactly what the Swede next did!

It was about ten minutes before he reappeared, and I spent the interim wondering whether Ruyder could see from up on the platform where Larsen had gone with his first load.

There was a brisk wind stirring the air, and all hands were needed at the lines when the *Josephine* brought down a loaded barge a few minutes later, so I did not see Larsen return for the rest of the lumber. Neither could I hear any sounds of sawing or hammering, so I judged he must be pretty well down the river in the thick willow thickets.

It was about four o'clock when the Swede finished what he was doing and came back. He put the saw in the chest, but that evening I noticed that a small wood mallet and a three-quarter inch chisel were missing. For the rest of the evening Larsen wrastled with a shovel just as though he was an ordinary hunkey instead of a privileged character surrounded with mystery.

THAT night in the bunkhouse the boys did some kidding with Larsen, but he didn't have much to say. He grinned a lot, however. Ruyder didn't have a chance to tell the boys anything about what I'd told him about Larsen until after supper, but he got it pretty well spread before bedtime and the kidding suddenly stopped.

Willie Hobbs walked into town for the evening mail, in which is the paper for me. We have an agreement that Willie, or whoever is willing to go after it, can have first shot at the comic section.

Personally, I was more interested in that killing of a policeman. I noticed in the paper the names of the two suspects who were held. These are Johnny Magruder, a thin, woppish looking little rat by his picture, and Ted "High-Pockets" Schramm, a foggy looking Dutchman. You can tell very little about pictures of crooks—mugs, the cops call them—because when a man is dressed up with a collar and tie they look entirely different.

Their pictures were both in the paper, but naturally I could not say whether either of them were among our six friends who had done the shooting two days before.

The boys all turned in early and I sat up reading a while.

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I don't know what gave me the idea, but after listening to them a while I was pretty sure that they were all asleep and I got the crazy notion of ploughing through the woods to see whether I could find out what that dumb Swede did with those boards.

My flashlight was under my pillow, but I got it without waking anybody, although I fell over the Swede's shoes which he had set right in the middle of the floor. Incidentally the Swede didn't need a saw to saw wood, as he had a regular buzz saw connected with his tonsils.

Pretty well down I found a path, and the ground was damp enough to leave pretty fair tracks which I followed for a good eighth of a mile. Most of the growth was brush, tangled with drift that pops like a shot when stepped on, but I didn't think anybody back at the bunkhouse would hear me as long as the Swede was snoring.

All of a sudden I came to a little clearing not thirty feet from the water's edge. All but a thin screen of willows had been cut away, the screen obviously having been left to conceal the clearing from anybody that passed on the river. Right in the middle of this clearing was something made out of brand new white pine planks!

Off-hand I couldn't say whether I was looking at a patent kitchen sink with a built in dish-washer, or some kind of a cage for raising silver foxes. Whatever it was, it was just the kind of a contraption that a dumb Swede would build out in the middle of the woods.

Still, I knew that there was some real or fancied reason for the thing, so I examined it carefully.

The front side was of solid planks, laid horizontally. A couple of uprights of ordinary willow, cut somewhere along the bank, held these in position. Getting behind the thing I saw it was pretty well braced so that it would stand alone. On this back side was a little box nailed to a brace. Inside that box I found my wood chisel and mallet, also two pieces of chalk!

This was about all there was to it, except that he had sawed a good sized notch in one of the planks before nailing it on, and you could stand behind this barricade —that's what it looked like most—and look across the river through this notch.

Not finding anything else of interest, I got back to the works just as it began to rain. It had been threatening since about six o'clock.

III

IT MUST have rained pretty nearly all night, for in the morning the river had come up a foot. This river is crazy that way, and we have to watch it or some morning we will wake up and find our dredge sitting high and dry up on one of the cliffs.

A foot, however, made no difference except for the *Josephine,* which is a stern wheeler and not a good boat for swift current. It had quit raining after breakfast and we went to work as usual.

At ten o'clock I was up on the platform handling the hoist for a change and happened to look up-river at the dredge. Suddenly three puffs of steam jumped out of her whistle.

The sound of the three toots did not arrive until several seconds later, as the dredge was easily half a mile above us, but the puffs were enough. Three whistles means that they want the foreman immediately, and I am the foreman.

Ruyder had just made the last hitch on the barge's cleats—an empty barge that the *Josephine* was about to take up in place of the load she had brought down.

"Get up there," I jerked at him as I came down. "Larsen," I called, "come with me."

Joey had his head sticking out the pilot house window and I gave him full speed ahead. A couple of gongs clanged. Larsen made a flying leap from a pile and hit the iron barge deck with both feet together with a splatting noise and we ploughed into the drift.

It was easy enough to see that the river was up more than a foot, now, and rising fast. They must have had a good deal more rain up above than we had had, and it was about time for it to be hitting us.

Joey was holding her into the shore as

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much as he could without getting the pilot house and stacks raked off by the overhanging limbs, but even then we made very poor time.

A hundred yards away from the dredge scow we broke around a bend and I could see from the bow of the barge why they had whistled for help.

Some time during the night the current must have undercut that bank deeper than the intake had already undercut it by suction. Right square over the cabins hung a big sycamore tree about four feet in diameter and at least a hundred feet high, the way they grow wild along rivers. And a blind man could see the roots snapping along the bank, sending little chunks of dirt into the river!

In about sixteen seconds, more or less, that sycamore was going to fall. And when she fell there was not going to be any more dredge!

WE COULD see Willie Hobbs running around like a beheaded chicken, and Jimmy Luse, his pumper, working with the forward capstan. As if casting off forward would do anything, with the current carrying her right into the bank and under that leaning tree!

On account of a half filled barge on the outside of the dredge we could not get in close. The barge was loaded well forward under the flow, not having been moved down yet, and the stern was sticking high out of the water—even higher than the empty upon which we had come up.

Giving a quick look at Joey, I took a run and jumped. It was a good three feet, and two up, but I made it, not thinking until afterwards what would have happened if I'd missed. A second after my feet hit, those two barges slammed together with an impact that would have flattened me like a pancake if I'd gone down between them.

Larsen was right behind me, but he played sensible and waited until they had touched.

"Cast off," I bellowed to Luse. "Get the ax!"

"Damned pin——" That was all I caught of what he yelled back, but I knew that the capstan shackle was probably rusty, on top of the hawser getting soaking wet and stiff from the night's rain.

Without waiting to see what Joey was going to do, I ran for the capstan aft, trying to break it loose with a pinch bar which was handy. This was stuck, too.

Hobbs was yelling bloody murder and looking over his shoulder at the sycamore. Every time another root popped he'd let out another yell.

Suddenly Larsen is right behind me, and he speaks up.

"Outa the way, fellah. Lemme at it."

Giving me a push, he grabs that winch with his bare hands, gives her a tug, and out she comes *by the roots!*

That thing has a solid iron core that must weigh at least two hundred pounds! That is not so much for a man to lift, but God knows how much lateral stress there was on the pin, with the current pulling both dredge and barge outward against an inch and a half hemp hawser fastened to a tree on the bank. The capstan was supposed to be shackled underneath, but evidently the pin had come out, otherwise I guess he would have torn up half the deck.

I know there was a pull on that line, for the minute he got it out of its socket it gave a leap and jumped overboard.

Joey's fireman meanwhile had got the two barges lashed—the one next to the dredge and the one the *Josephine* had just brought up with us on it. There was a shudder as Luse finally found the ax and hacked the forward line. Then more bells as Joey gives his big wheel a spin and signals for speed.

For a dozen heart-tearing seconds we stood still; then the paddle-wheel took hold and we moved, little by little. Somebody sighed out loud.

The next instant there was a mighty splash. The sycamore had come down. Six seconds earlier and it would have caught the intake pipe, in spite of it being raised as high as it would go. As it was a sheet of water splashed clear into the engine room through the forward door, where I could hear it sizzling in the ash boxes even above the puffing of the tug's stacks as Joey gave her the last half ounce.

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THE first thing I did was hop on Willie's neck for not seeing that those winches were in order.

"An' furthermore," I balled him out, "one more line lashed to a winch and you and me take forked roads which never meet again. You could just as easily take three turns around them and snub to the cleats, which are there for that purpose."

"That takes two men to handle——"

"Yeah; but to raise this dredge off the bottom in thirty-five feet of water would take all the king's men with the horses thrown in," I snapped back at him.

When I had controlled myself and helped them get a new set, it suddenly occurred to me that Hans Larsen had said a few words during the excitement that certainly did not sound Swedish. I began to ponder.

Larsen had gone back to the tug and I swung on, giving the signal to Joey to head down to the works. Larsen was taking it easy in the fireman's chair up at the prow where he could get a nice breeze free of cinders, and I kinda stole up on him, suddenly rounding the corner of the boiler house.

"What's your name?" I barked, trying to take him off guard.

"Me," grinned Larsen. "My name ban Larsen."

"What nationality are you?" I queried sharp.

"Ay ban—what you call Swede," he cooed.

"Yeah; but a while ago you didn't talk good Swedish. In fact, Larsen, I think you're a fake. If you're Swedish, then I'm a Chinese laundryman."

"Ay forgot," he explained sheepishly, avoiding my eye, and looking on down river to the right.

As I have said before there was a bend in the river at this point. Below, on the right side the bank is pretty high and full of mud swallow holes but with few trees except some scrubby poplars up on the top.

Suddenly Larsen leaps out of his chair, letting out a bellow. Then he grabs me.

"More speed," he yells. "Tell that wheel climbing ranny upstairs to sink 'em deep an' high tail. Burn the trail!"

Evidently I didn't start to give orders soon enough, for after waltzing me around for three turns Larsen starts for the boiler-deck ladder himself.

Right then I knew that Larsen was no Swede.

Also, upon looking straight ahead past the poplars I saw two automobiles parked in that meadow across from the works, and several men standing nearby. Presently a puff of blue smoke seemed to come from the outstretched hand of one of them, and the report came faintly to me after several seconds.

By these tokens I learned that our red-hot friends were out for a few more bulls' eyes. Also that this fake Swede was *interested in red-hots!*

Behind me a lot of bells began to jangle at once, and I judged that Larsen had reached the pilot house and was beginning to romp over the engine room telegraph.

IV

RUYDER had shut off the belt when we arrived and was busy shoveling under the run and cussing Larsen for going away and letting it pile up. If he thought Larsen was going to wait to hear these peevish remarks he was pretty far off.

With one leap the pseudo-Swede cleared five feet of water and hit the piles running. About three steps took him to the bunk-house and through. Three more brought him out again, and Ruyder and I stood there with our mouths hanging open while Larsen galloped into the brush.

Whatever it was he went to the bunk-house for must have been locked up in his suitcase. It looked like some kind of a musical instrument like a flute or clarinet in a black leatherette case which Larsen tucked under his arm as he got up speed.

If Larsen hopes to play something soothing to those red-hots he is sure to find out that for soothing the savage breast a piece of lead pipe or a sawed-off shotgun is safer for the soother.

Being naturally curious, I followed at a canter, leaving Ruyder still shoveling and cussing.

In the back of my head I was beginning to have some kind of an idea of what he was going to do. Larsen was here especially to frame something on those gangsters!

And that wooden contraption I had dis-

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covered a while ago was part of the frame-up.

While I was still fifty yards from the clearing Larsen had cut, I heard a couple of bullets cutting paths through the leaves. The red-hots were pretty well started on their target practice. From this point on I began ducking behind trees and wishing that some of the trees were a little larger. Finally I found a good sized maple, and by not breathing too heavily I could keep it between all of me and the opposite bank.

While my view of Larsen was not perfect I could see that he was behind his wooden barricade. And now I knew what that notch in the boards was for! The thing in the leather case was not a musical instrument but a long brass telescope with which Larsen was watching the antics of the shooters across the river!

There were six more shots. Larsen waited a minute, then the telescope wobbled and I saw him run out from behind the planking, make a few quick motions and jump back to cover again. The telescope came up and pretty soon another man over there took his turn with six shots.

This went on for about ten minutes. Then I saw Larsen come out, close up his spy glass and look leisurely across. Turning that way, I saw the two automobiles bumping and bouncing down the lane toward the bridge. Practice was over.

I stalked out.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Larsen," I says coolly. "So this is the way you are spending the company's time."

IF I had expected Larsen to be flustrated at me popping out on him that way I was all wrong. He merely looked up, once more forgetting all about him supposed to be Swedish, and says: "Hy'ah, Sprague?" And went on completing what he had started to do.

When I lamped the front side of that white pine contraption I had a sudden spasm of understanding. He had lined up his barricade with that target on the other side; so that every time they missed he caught the bullet in his planks, unless they missed too much. There were a dozen of these bullet holes in the front of the barricade, and between shots he had marked the new holes each time. Some were surrounded by a circle, others by a square. Also there were triangles and just plain X's, marking the holes.

As I said I was seeing a bright light. All in all, those bullet holes were marked in *four* different ways. And there were *four* men across there, doing the shooting! This made a different mark for each man, and through a twenty or forty power telescope on a rest in that notch, as his had been, it would be easy enough to identify a man at that distance!

And now Larsen calmly went to work with the mallet and wood chisel which I had found there the night before, digging out all the bullets which were surrounded by circles. All of the bullets which came out of the circles went into a tobacco sack which had a paper tag on it. On this tag he made a circle and under it some initials. Next he started digging the bullets from the holes marked with triangles.

In about fifteen minutes he had all the bullets out and sacked. Then Larsen grins at me and hands me the chisel and mallet.

"Yuh might take these up to the bunkhouse for me, Sprague. I've got to highball over to town pronto. Come to think of it, I may not be at the shebang tomorrow, and maybe not the day after either. Rathbone will come over and collect my outfit if I need it. Well, so long."

"Just one minute, Larsen," I piped up. "Remember that I'm the long sufferin' foreman of this crew and explanations are in order even if they seem superfluous to you. I'm not so dumb as to think that Rathbone hired you to take samples of those gunmen's bullets. Also I'm clever enough to surmise that somebody else did."

"Yeah; that's true, Sprague. Yuh guessed that all right. But I was instructed to maintain secrecy, and instructions are instructions."

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"Tell me one thing," I suggested. "Does this have something to do with the two coppers who have been killed in the city recently, and also whether those two bozos who were held, according to yesterday's paper, were among that bunch today."

Larsen looked reluctant, but finally loosened up.

"The two you mention, Sprague, are still in the calaboose. It's one of the best calabooses I've ever had a look-see at. The four today were pals of those two, and we think that among these four are at least one and maybe two who killed the two policemen yuh mention."

"Who are these four red-hots," I wanted to know. "And how come you know them by sight through your telescope?"

Again he looks reluctant, but evidently decides that I'm harmless. He pulls out a handful of pictures. At very first glance I knew that these were "mugs." There's a front and profile view of four different men, each picture being labeled on the back.

I read over the names. "Onions" Signeggi, Marty Rich, Frank Evans and Pat (Irish) Greenberg. All of these I had seen at one time or another in the public print. All of them had wiggled out of convictions on more than one occasion. All of them had long police records!

"YEAH," drawls Larsen. "These boys have beat the rap too often. We know they're guilty as hell, Sprague, but a jury is a tender hearted insect; also some juries are leery of getting a bullet in the back from some dark alley when they bring a conviction. So I was asked by a good friend of mine to take care of these boys. What you have seen was the first step. From here I ramble back to town to have a pasear with the—with my friend."

"Does your friend," I asked him, "happen to be the Circuit Attorney?"

"Not any," he chuckled. "My friends are all square shooters, Sprague. Also," and here he looks me straight in the eye, "they know when to keep their mouths tight and say nothing of what they have seen or heard."

"Meaning me, eh. O. K., Larsen. And about the bullets?"

"The bullets go back to town where they'll be photographed by the *comparograph.*"

Having read of this in the papers, I knew that it was a machine which photographed the bullets, marked by gun rifling, and then compared any two bullets. This was done by a system of crossed lines which showed up in a highly magnified view. If the bullets which had killed those two police had been saved, as I guessed they had, why the comparograph could quickly tell whether they came from the same gun as the specimens which Larsen had dug out of that nice *soft* white pine wood. That was the reason he had used white pine.

"Well," says Larsen, reverting again to his comedy role. "Ay ban finished. Ay go now. Goo' by."

V

WHEN *those red-hots come again, Larsen will be here, too.*

Three days I said this to myself over and over again. Larsen, as you will surmise, had not showed up yet, nor the gangsters either. But I was fairly certain that when they did come they'd come together, even though the gangsters might not be aware of it until disagreeably surprised.

In the meanwhile I had explained to the boys that Larsen had been called back by the main office. Ruyder didn't believe this, and I doubt whether Joey did either, for they had seen Larsen leave the tug that day and start for the brush. I talked privately to these two and convinced them that minding a man's own business is the one true way to heavenly bliss.

It was about eleven o'clock on the fourth morning. The river lay absolutely dead with not a breeze to stir the surface. The tug had just vanished around the bend, but the sun was still dancing on her wash, throwing speckled lights on the willows. I thought it was a right, pretty scene, and again I thought of that old song, "Steamboat Comin' 'Round the Bend."

And all of a sudden I had that queer feeling again that whatever was around the bend was not a steamboat. Within five minutes events had proven that I was right.

It was a power boat, coming up the river from town—one of these fancy mahogany hulls with an outboard motor concealed in

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the stern, making it look like a real motor boat. In this boat were three men, one of them in a blue uniform with a white cap. The other two wore plain clothes, and I was not long in noting that Hans Larsen was one of the two. The last was evidently a dick. You can tell a dick.

Larsen was wearing his usual grin as the launch nosed up to the piles. I grabbed the line he threw to me and pulled it in easy until its rub rails bumped. The man in the blue uniform had kept his face turned toward the opposite shore, but now he shifted and I gave a gasp. I did not need to listen to Larsen's introductions. I already knew him.

"Hy'ah, Sprague," grinned Larsen. "Brought some friends out. This is Chief Martin O'Rourke. He's a fast hombre in the criminal catching business. An' this is Detective-Sergeant Jo Lindenmeier. Thought I might need a little help. Also I would like to say, Sprague, that the Chief and Lindemeier haven't any jurisdiction outside of city limits, so keep yore hat on if anything happens and they take a hand. Savvy?"

The Chief of Police, whose picture I had seen many times in the papers, reaches up a hand.

"Glad to know you, Sprague. I daresay you wouldn't object to some explanations. I happened to play golf with your boss, Harry Rathbone, on the afternoon after the little shooting episode—when he asked these Cuckoos to move their target. When he told me about it I thought we might be able to use some of those stray bullets. I came out here that night and looked over the land, to see where their bullets were hitting and whether we could catch a few for Exhibits. I may say that everything worked admirably. We've rapped Rich and Evans on the two killings in the Department, thanks to Mr.—ah—my friend Larsen."

When the cops say they've "rapped" a guy they mean they've nailed him, got the goods, the evidence necessary to convict him. I grinned a little bit. You might say that the red-hots had the Swedish Rap, for Larsen after all is supposed to be a Swede. Maybe you have heard of the Dutch Rub, where a bird buries his knuckles in your scalp and digs in 'til you yell "turkey." Now you have also heard of the Swedish Rap. There is quite a difference.

"In regard to jurisdiction," the chief went on, "as a matter of fact Larsen—that isn't his name but we'll continue to call him that—Larsen has even less than I have. He doesn't even live in this State. I met him a couple of years ago down in Texas in a wild oil town. Larsen hit that Texas oil burg at seven o'clock in the evening, accompanied by two pearl-handled Colt Frontier Models, single action guns, and by seven the next morning there was a minister of the gospel holding a revival in the saloon. I never saw a town cleaned up any prettier. Larsen is a member of the State Police down there, and cleaning is his business."

"The Rangers!" I gulped, looking at him wide-eyed. I had never seen a Ranger so close before. And to think that I had had a Ranger working for me!

"I invited Larsen to run up to the city some time when he could get a furlough," O'Rouke finished, "and he blew in about a week ago, just in time to help me out with this Cuckoo problem. This is just recreation for him."

Well, I was glad the dredge wasn't paying Larsen for his recreation anyway. During this discourse Larsen was staring moodily out over the river. Now he stirred.

"BE HERE shortly," he grunted. Then he looked up at Ruyder, who during this time had been hanging over the platform with his ears flapping. "Better order Ruyder down, Sprague. He can see too much from up there. We don't need witnesses."

"You're expecting the red-hots, then?"

"Any minute. They're coming in two cars—Rich and Evans in the first. The chief got the tip in advance from a stoolie,

and he's going to try to stop the second car, which will probably contain three or

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four more. We have nothing definite against these others. How long has the tug been up?"

"Just went up. Won't be down for a couple of hours."

"That's good. When they turn in tell Ruyder to come down. We'll get over there before they stop their motors and slip up on them easy." He looked around. "Maybe the best place for you and Ruyder to get is behind the hopper. I'm gonna try to corral them hombres without spilling any of their vital fluid, but yuh never can tell." He looked significantly at Chief O'Rourke as he said that.

By the look that O'Rourke returned I gathered that the chief would not bother about blood. His jaws had closed like a trap and his eyes glittered. To me it looked like the chief would positively enjoy a couple of buckets of blood.

"These men have committed murder in the first degree," he said in a harsh tone. "In this State that's a capital offense. In this city certain political influences have made it a joke. If either of those crooks get hurt, they'll know just what they're being punished for. Furthermore——"

This was as far as the chief got. At that instant we saw an automobile pull into the pasture down at the end of the lane and drive rapidly toward us. Only a hundred or so feet behind came a second machine.

O'Rourke gave a low groan, while the dick emitted several cuss words. "The second car must have given my men the slip," says O'Rourke.

But Larsen merely lifts the lid over the outboard motor and gives her a swift kick. It was the first time I ever heard of an outboard motor starting without talking back.

Already the boat was pulling away when I came to a quick decision. Never had I seen a Texas Ranger close-up and in action. Now was the time or never!

I gave a leap and landed in O'Rourke's lap. At the same time I signaled Ruyder to stop the belt and get down quick.

The fact that there are six of these birds over there instead of two does not seem to bother Larsen at all.

"More the merrier," he grunts, giving the motor the gas.

IT IS a quarter of a mile easily from where they turned in down to the target. This means a good half a minute for the cars, for the road is nothing but a cow path. In the middle of the river, however, we could not see them on account of the high mud bank.

We ranged along shore for several rods, finally bumping against a submerged log which made the whole boat shudder. Larsen was the first to get ashore, with Chief O'Rourke right behind him. I followed with the dick they had called Lindenmeier.

Behind a clump of iron weed and Johnson grass Larsen stops and unwraps something which I had seen him snatch out of the bottom of the boat. It proved to be a gun belt with enough cartridges stuck in the loops to re-take the Alamo and two ivory handled revolvers which are big enough to have come off of a battleship.

Having adjusted these around his middle and tied down the holsters, Larsen looks meaningly at the chief.

"Remember yore jurisdiction, Chief. You're not to be seen by any of these hombres that happen to get back to tell the tale."

"Jurisdiction hell," snorts O'Rourke, taking a Police Positive out of his hip pocket. Lindenmeier also produced a shiny thirty-eight. "I've got just as much jurisdiction as you have."

"Yeah, but you've also got on a uniform, Chief, and you're known up here, while I'm not. You stay under cover and keep a few of them covered while I'm makin' palaver with the others."

With that Larsen raises up full height behind a cottonwood, waiting until all five men—there being only three in the second car—have alighted and walked over to put fresh target sheets on their target stand. The rest of us crouch behind the trees, drawing a sharp breath as Larsen breaks out of cover.

For about fifty feet he walks calmly up on them before they saw him. I was holding my breath, having forgotten that a certain amount of ozone is necessary to keep a guy going.

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All of a sudden one of them looks up. He mutters something which we could not hear, although they are only about a hundred feet from us. Then all the others focus their eyes on Larsen.

"Hy'ah, fellahs," we hear him say, real cheerful.

VI

ABOUT five seconds passed, any one of which might have been filled with powder smoke. Then Marty Rich, reputed leader of the Cuckoo Gang, speaks up in a nervous way.

"Howdy. Do you own this land here?"

This must have given the Ranger an idea, and he was not long in following it up.

"Paw owns it," he says. "I live up yon way a piece. Heard shootin' the other day and I figures somebody is havin' target practice down here. So I bought me some ca'tridges in town and allowed I'd come down for a few shots myself if yuh happened to leave any targets around. I never knew that you all would be here today."

The way Larsen imitates a hick is a caution. I could see that they had swallowed this, pole and all.

"Lookit the rods," somebody says. "'Drugstore cowboy.'"

"Show him how to shoot!"

The Ranger reaches round and grabs his right holster with his left hand and pretends to try to draw a weapon. It seems to stick in the leather for some reason and there is more laughter, punctuated with shots. The bird named Greenberg has *emptied* his gat at the bull's eye.

"I wouldn't want to show up you fellahs," says Larsen, finally getting a gun out. "Some of the rest of yuh shoot some first."

In a flash I saw his play!

The little wop, Signeggi is next to fire, shooting six times.

"How many times does that thing shoot?" queried the fake farmer, who I now know is a Ranger. Signeggi's gun is an automatic. The wop lifts it and fires once more. Now we all know it is empty. You have to watch those automatics.

"Yo're next," says Larsen, indicating Schramm. High Pockets Schramm was one of the two whose map had appeared in the evening paper right after the killing of the copper in the laundry hold-up. The other one's name was Magruder, but he did not come out with them.

Schramm shook his head, shrugged and held out empty hands. "Not shooting today." It may be, I thought, that the cops forgot to give him back his favorite gun when they turned him out. He had driven the second car, I noticed.

"Well, then," says Larsen still drawling, "I reckon we'd better get down to business. Yore guns are empty—you two—and never mind loadin' 'em again."

Larsen's voice changed timbre so quickly that it cracked like a whip!

"Marty Rich—Franky Evans—you're wanted for the murder of two coppers in cold blood. I came here to get yuh. *Put up yore hands, or fill 'em!*"

At the same time his voice changed Larsen stepped back three paces and seemed to hunch over. His thumbs were hooked easily into his gun belts. And for three seconds the three of them stood poised—Rich and Evans already with loaded guns dangling *in their hands!*

IT TOOK those three seconds for the situation to penetrate those gangsters' skulls. Then Evans spit out an oath and Rich sent up a howl.

"Framed, by——!"

Larsen must have dropped his hands to his guns, but I never saw them. I only saw one motion—easy, serpentine, swifter than light. There was a roar like a dynamite blast, and I saw two men sinking downward. Evans twisted on the way down and he had a hole in the middle of his forehead. I could even see his eyes rolling. But that was not all.

The man named Greenberg had swung his gun around by the guard and lashed out at Larsen's head, butt end, hammer down. I gave a groan.

Hardly losing his balance, Larsen sidesteps, swinging in his left gun for a shot full into Greenberg's stomach that doubled him up like a campcot.

Signeggi, wiser than Greenberg, was darting around the machine out of range. He snatched something from inside. I saw

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the barrel of a sawed off shotgun come up. It was then that I let out a yell.

All at once there was an explosion in my ears at close range. O'Rourke and the dick had fired together. I saw Signeggi

pitch back, the gun falling from his hands and Schramm plowing after it. A fourth shot from Larsen's pair of gats, the right one this time, took Schramm in the oustretched arm, rolling him over howling. Larsen was right on him, kicking the shotgun out of reach.

After his shot O'Rourke started to break cover. The dick had a strangle hold on his shins; the chief was swearing a blue streak and the dick was yelling to me to grab him some place else as his own hold on the chief's ankles was precarious, not to say slipping fast.

"They haven't seen you," I grunted in his ear. "Get down, Chief."

This seemed to bring him to his senses. Schramm would know that somebody had shot from the bushes, but he wouldn't know who.

"I ought to clean yuh out to the finish," Larsen was telling Schramm as he flung two dead ones and two others almost dead into the rear car, a seven passenger sedan. "Try drivin' with one hand, fellah, and don't start monkey business. Now highball. Burn the trail for home."

"My God," weeps Schramm. "Oh, my God!"

"Yeah;" Larsen agrees. "It's pretty bad. You don't want to monkey with no farmer boys hereafter. Drugstore cowboy! Huh!"

When Schramm has turned out of the lane into the road Larsen calmly jacks out a few spent shells and blows the powder dust out of the barrels of his pearl handled pets.

THAT is all, except that the next day who should drive up to the works but Rathbone and Chief O'Rourke. The latter passes out cigars.

"Thought I'd come get Tarbell's stuff, including his pay check," says O'Rourke, grinning.

"Who?"

O'Rourke laughed. "Larsen's real name is Tarbell—accented on the first syllable. He's mighty well known down around Amarillo."

"Check?" I laughed. "Do you think he earned anything here?"

"Maybe not. Well, never mind that. I've brought you some papers that might interest you. And I hope you've sworn your boys to secrecy."

Papers! Yeah, I was interested, but I had already bought every paper which said anything about it. That was where the big laugh came in.

It seemed that the Cuckoos talked it over and decided that the River Rats had ambushed them. Still funnier, the police, represented in public print by Chief O'Rourke, were inclined to think the same thing. Nobody had been seen but Larsen, and only Schramm was making statements, and his didn't count.

The very next day the Cuckoos came back at the Rats, killing one. The next night the Rats went out and killed a Cuckoo. About a week later a Cuckoo—well, you know.

If they keep going they will all be mud in about two weeks.

next issue

"Dynamite"

a swift story of the frozen North by

JAMES B. HENDRYX

next issue

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SIDNEY HERSHEL SMALL *tells how*

Who has given us
"The Red Globe" and
many other fine tales
of Japan

THERE was treachery about. Crawford sensed it in the waiter who served him at the foreign-style Taihoku Hotel, in the coolie who pulled his riki-sha, in the boy who was now placing ice in his tall glass.

He wished that the other white man, a dozen feet away on the hotel balcony, would say something. He hadn't known there was another American in the Formosan city. All morning, as it had the day before, the monsoon had kept Crawford in his room. When it roared itself out, leaving blackish clouds hanging over the mountains, Taihoku again simmered in heat.

The two white men, sole guests on the balcony, both had amber drinks ready at their elbows, both seemed intent only on the cigarette smoke they blew from their lips. There the physical resemblance ended. The other man was very dark, fifty pounds heavier than Crawford, and ten years older. Crawford was twenty-five. Yet there seemed something kindred in their steady eyes and immobile faces.

The dark American ground out his

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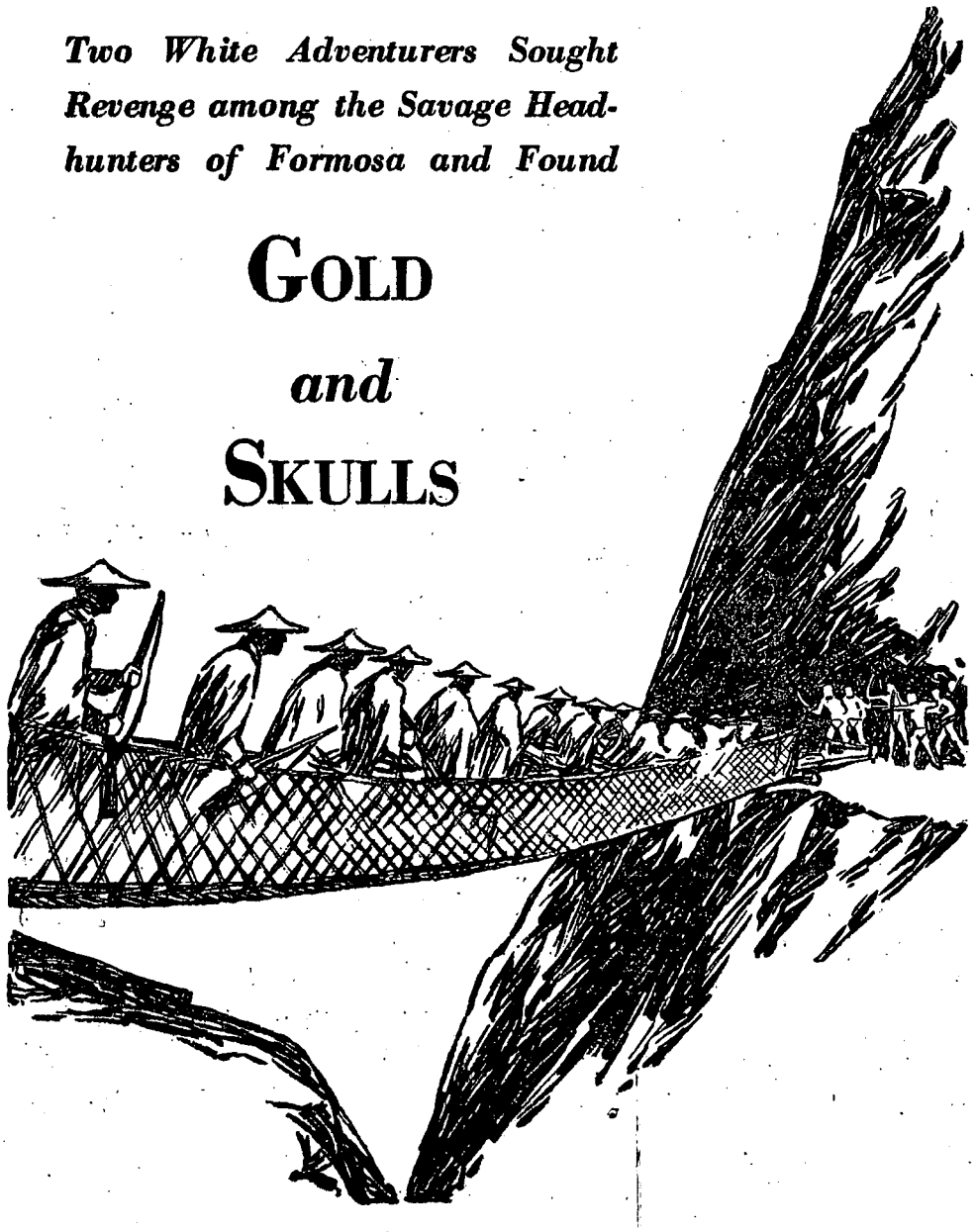
Two White Adventurers Sought Revenge among the Savage Head-hunters of Formosa and Found

GOLD *and* SKULLS



cigarette, lighted a second, waited until the Chinese boy added a half inch of whisky, a cube of ice and a dash of charged water to his already half filled glass, and then said to the servant: "Manager must see. Right away."

The Chinese servant muttered, "Can do," and shuffled into the hotel.

Then the dark white man said quietly, "The service is too good here."

"I've been getting it right along," Crawford agreed. "Too much of it." "Thought I was being honored," the other grinned. "Sure it's you?"

"Every time I go outside I'm followed—" Crawford started to say.

"Shut up. Here comes the manager."

The two white men resumed their contemplation of the street below. The perfume of orange and jasmine blossoms used to scent drying tea swirled up to them.

"What you one-time like?" the sweating Chinese hotel owner asked. "Ice got? Prenty?"

"It ain't King William," the older man snapped, pointing toward his bottle. "I know 'V. O. P.' is printed on the label, but it tastes rotten. Go find something better.

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And have the boy bring cigarettes." The moment they were alone again, he said softly, swiftly to Crawford, "That gets rid of 'em for a minute. I'm beginnin' to think they don't want us to talk. Got any idea why?"

"No more than why I'm being shadowed," Crawford answered.

"Come in with the proper papers? Not a tourist, are you? Your business—er—legitimate?"

"My name's Crawford," the younger man said. "Frankly, there's nothing secret about my being here. One of our men, Carter, came to Formosa a couple of months ago, to make a preliminary report on buildin' a bridge. We haven't had any report at all from him. I'm going to have a try at picking up his trail, if they'll let me. But the officials aren't very helpful——"

"Never are, in the Orient. By the way, my name is Blake. However"—lifting his glass, looking at it, and then placing it on the wicker stand untouched—"it won't do you any good to find your man."

Crawford said abruptly, "Why not?"

"Because he's dead. I saw Carter die." As Crawford started from his chair, Blake continued levelly, "Here come the Chino again. Let's go down to my room." Raising his voice, "I've got a deck of cards. Care for a game?"

Before Blake, in his room, had found the cards in his bag, another Chinese servant came into the room, offering to remain and serve them; when this was declined, the manager reappeared, warning both men against gambling in the hotel in such a way that each guest was supposed to believe the other a suspicious character.

When the two were finally alone in the hot airless room, and Blake was shuffling the cards, Crawford said slowly, "Something's up. It can't be about me. They must have us mixed up."

"That's what I'm afraid of. My papers are—well, better than my real ones would be, for one thing, and my business isn't exactly the sort to be published." He dealt out hands of double-dummy, and then said, "You want to know how Carter died, of course."

Somehow, Crawford found himself liking the adventurer; he was sure the other man was just that. He had met a few such white men before in the Orient. Blake, leaning across the small table, was whispering; "Here; pick up your cards, Crawford, and go through the form of playin', eh? I bid a spade. Carter, your engineer, wanted another white man with him. We—well let's just say I knew him in the States. You might as well know that I slipped a bit of opium into Formosa; the Japs wink at it if they get their cut. They think now that I've brought some more in, and haven't come across with their graft.

"About Carter. I went up with him. The location he was to examine was near the guard line. The *aiyusen*. Path, guarded with wire and soldiers, you know, to keep the Taiyals and other headhunters from reducin' the population too quickly. Carter got up there safely enough and made his surveys. And then on the way back he stopped to look at a hole some Japanese were digging. Why? Nobody knows why Japs do anything. And he had to pick the time a Chinese grandmother placed joss sticks at the edge of the hole. She thought the vapor—gas—comin' up showed that hell must be breakin' loose."

BLAKE lit another cigarette, said, "Two hearts," and then looked squarely at Crawford. "When she burned her joss, hell certainly exploded. I never found anything of Carter except—a couple of bones. You can take my word for it that Carter's dead."

"What's that got to do with my being shadowed?" Crawford asked steadily.

Blake spread out both dummies, and then spoke again. "Perhaps the Japanese officials hate to admit Carter was killed due to the lack of care they took in keepin' joss sticks away from their excavation."

"And perhaps they don't want me to go up to the place he died?" Crawford suggested.

"I'll bet when it comes to a showdown—you'll demand one, eh?—they say that there are absolutely no—remains—to ship back to the States. Or if there are, they'll send 'em... You intend insistin' on visitin'

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the village where Carter was killed?"

Crawford said, very low, "My orders were to bring Carter back, dead or alive. I'll do what I can."

"Stick to that, old man," Blake encouraged. "I'll meet you at the town called Senkizan. I'm sailin' out tonight; put in at a beach I know, and meet you day after tomorrow. Like to go along."

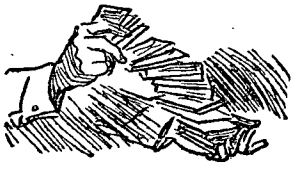
This time eye met eye. The form of laying down cards and collecting tricks was forgotten. Through Crawford's head ran tales he had heard of white men in the East; thieves and smugglers and gamblers and crooks. Blake was none of these. He felt sure of that. "Glad to have you," he said simply.

Saving "Thanks, old fellow," Blake picked up a handful of cards. He shuffled them so clumsily that several dropped to the floor under the table. When he picked them up and gave the deck to Crawford, he said grimly, "Watch your step."

In Crawford's fingers the cards seemed unusually heavy. Blake's words of caution in his ears, he lowered the pack below the level of the table. Crawford felt as much as saw, that the older man had added a thin, metallic oblong to the cards.

Forgetting that the damp, heat-twisted walls must have had ears, Crawford blurted, "So that's what they were digging for? And Carter knew——"

"Play cards," Blake growled loudly. His voice low, compelling, he whispered, "Meet you Senkizan. Play your hand the best you can, but don't let 'em talk you out of goin'. It's gold. Carter gave it to me." So abruptly that Crawford was startled, Blake again spoke aloud. "I can't waste my time playin' for nothing. We better call the game off. I'm goin' to take a siesta."



For a moment Crawford supposed that Blake, with his final words, was intimating something which had two meanings; then, as Blake nodded, Crawford said loudly: "I should have listened to the manager. You're trying to get my money away from me."

Blake's swift grin and wink told Crawford that the older man approved of it.

Crawford went rapidly to his own room, at the far end of the corridor; as he had opened Blake's door to leave he had been positive that scurrying feet had taken spying bodies out of sight. No sooner had he pulled off his white drill jacket than the Chinese manager himself knocked and entered.

Crawford snapped: "Why you no tell me that man gambler? You think it *maskee* I lose my money?"

"Too bad," the Chinaman bowed. "You got money foh passage? All white man him say *Ninoamasaki Maru* good boat. He sail tomollah happernoon. Good whisky dlink on him. I give you money foh go. You give me chek-papah say how much. Too bad. I say white man not you fliend. Bad gamblah."

So the Chinese manager of the hotel—obeying whose orders?—was suggesting that he was so anxious to get the white man out of Formosa, so anxious to keep him from going after what was left of Carter, that the necessary money would be advanced? That was obvious. But who else was interested in getting him away? That was much less clear. Crawford also realized that the listening spy hadn't done any too well in reporting what had happened in Blake's room. Apparently the Chinese thought the game had broken up over a money argument. Good! If such were the case, the spy must have missed the really important portions of the conversation, or at least given no importance to them.

"Money have left," Crawford said. "Sure, tomorrow I go. Tomorrow morning I see top-side man, get all paper signed, and then I go away."

Ti Ch'ong smiled.

"Too bad you go foh me," he said. "Guest him not come too much here. Too bad foh me, but velly numbah-one good foh you." Blandly, "Too bad you no sabee."

As the door closed behind the Chinese, Crawford suddenly put his thumb to his nose and waggled his fingers.

Crawford saw nothing of Blake at dinner, nor on the balcony after; a night wind from the ocean cooled his room, and he slept well. When he awoke in the morning,

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he saw that every inch of his baggage had been picked over.

But the thin piece of flattened, sliced gold that Blake had slipped him had spent the night, undisturbed and unseen, strapped to Crawford's stomach with a strip of adhesive from his emergency kit. He had done this in the dark, in bed. Before dressing in the morning, he jerked it off, lest the gum might loosen during the day, and slid it into the pocket from which he drew cigarettes.

Since every scrap of paper in bags or pockets had been copied during the night and found uninteresting, when Crawford arrived before the proper Japanese overlord official he was told now that the engineer, Carter, had been killed by a poisonous snake, but that if Mr. Crawford wished to verify this—although the body would be swollen and terrible if it could be found—permission would be given to look for it. More, a guide would be provided. Warnings against savage headhunting Taiyals was thrown in for good measure, together with what might have passed as an apology:

"We regret that you were under suspicion," the oily official said. "If that man Blake had not come to the same hotel, you would not have been delayed here. He is an evil man. In the opium trade, which we try to stamp out. We feared that you and he——"

"Never saw him before," Crawford said lightly and truly.

"He and his rascally boat left this morning. You will never see him again."

The white man, bowing his departure, smiled just as blandly as the Oriental.

II

WHEN Crawford was landed from a junk at Senkizan, the sun was almost setting over the river. Dusky ghosts of sampans glided along against a jonquil sky. Following the course of the stream were lush stretches of sugar cane, but to the north and east the mountains reared, green, chrome-yellow and black in the faltering light.

Crawford's guide said, none too pleasantly: "If you loiter, it will be dark before we arrive. Senkizan is not a good place. If we return to the boat, we can be taken back to Taihoku. Perhaps that will be better. There is not a good inn here anyhow."

Crawford did not trouble to reply. All day the halfcaste guide furnished the white man by the Japanese officials had been suggesting a return; Crawford supposed he was merely following instructions.

Smoke clouded the doorways of the mud, grass-roofed huts, where Formosan women boiled the evening meal. The mud huts gave way to tile roofed houses of the Chinese quarter.

At last the guide entered a shop, growled a word to the Formosan squatted near a heap of noisome baskets of food, and pulled off his foreign shoes. Crawford, none too happily, did the same, and the footgear were chucked into a box containing those of fellow guests. How many generations of unwashed, filthy feet had climbed the ladderlike stairway Crawford did not want to guess. The second-story hallway was so narrow that Crawford automatically turned sidewise; here there were shallow alcoves with sections of floor raised three feet and covered with straw mats. On these mats the guests of the inn, mostly Chinese, were reclining.

Crawford and his halfcaste guide were taken to a filthy cubbyhole; that would be their room for the night.

Crawford shrugged his shoulders, decided to make the best of it. He handed the guide a silver coin and ordered him to go out and buy some food. The man below would send up tea and hot water.

Crawford found a cigarette, looked at the makeshift bed, and leaned against the wall. Then he saw that someone was standing at the entrance to his cubbyhole. In the dim, smoky light he supposed that it was a Chinese, but:

"Got here, eh?" he heard Blake say softly. "All set? Let's get out."

"The guide? Will he say——"

"He won't say anything," Blake told Crawford gravely. "He's going to spend a week in Senkizan, and it won't cost him a penny. Tell you about it later. Ready?"

The swift Oriental night had already darkened the village; Blake led the way without a word, and soon they were pass-

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ing through fields of sweet potatoes, cabbages and pumpkins. Almost at once the grass grown path started upward, at first winding across a terraced tea garden and a grove of oranges and limes, but the next bend brought them into an almost black thicket of plantains, elephants' ears, hibiscus, wild hydrangea and giant tree ferns. Here the way was fairly well defined. Blake whistled softly to himself as the two men plunged ahead in the gloom, but when the foliage could no longer be seen, and the way was like a black wall before them, he stopped.

"Follow carefully," he said. "Don't want to break a path anyone can see."

Blake pushed ferns and shrubs gently aside, but only went ten feet from the path. Here he trampled down a space, and then dropped the rolled blankets he carried to the crushed plants.

"This'll be better than that buggy inn," Blake remarked. "And safer."

Crawford sat on the blanket the other man spread.

"I don't give a hang," he said, "but what happened to the guide?"

"He was a surprised boy when I grabbed him. He'll stay in Senkizan until we get back. Be in our way. Matter of fact, I was too gentle with him."

"What'd he do to you?"

"He? He's just a cog. But I hate to think what would have happened if I'd sailed for China, as I told 'em in Taihoku.

Some kind soul put a contraption in the hold. Slow fuse. Slowest one I ever heard about. She banged just as I was off the mouth of the river. My ship's finished."

"If you'd been at sea——"

"They'd have been squared because they thought I hadn't kicked across with the opium graft? Wish I thought so! Nope; it's because I knew Carter, and also because I looked up the records to see if that hole-diggin' was official, and it ain't. Somebody's runnin' a whizzer on the Japanese government—did you ever see such gold?"

Crawford said what he thought: "I don't see how Carter could get refined gold, or whatever it is, up in the hills. Was it part of an ornament? Or——"

"Grains picked out of rock and flattened with a hammer. He told me. It's all large grained. Uncoated. No sulphur here."

Uneasily, Crawford said, "I'm here to find Carter's body. That's my job. But even if you find gold, what'll you do with it? Pack out as much as you can?"

"That's where you'll come in. Got it all figured out." Sharply, "Half for you, half for me. Net. Any split'll be taken equally from each share." While Crawford was wondering if Blake feared being cheated, the dark man's next words corrected him. "Do you know, a fellow gets lonesome as the devil on a ship with Chinos and Malays? I—I haven't been to the States for —a long time. You and Carter're the only white men—. Let's get some sleep!"

Crawford imitated the way Blake prepared one of the two blankets. Food was not mentioned, but when the men rolled up Blake said. "Don't smoke, old man."

AT FIRST, instinctively, Crawford listened for forest sounds, but he heard nothing, not even the soft sweep of leaf against leaf, nor dropping hibiscus flowers. Once a shrike shot past, the bird's long forked tail almost touching his face.

As the moon swung above the mountain, light filtered down to the nearby path, visible where the brush was less thick. The earthy trail was turned to black and silver. For a long time, sleepless, Crawford watched the lovely light, and then, suddenly, without turning, found Blake's shoulder and pressed it steadily. There was one little sound as Blake came to his elbow, and then both men stared at the path. Without having heard him, Crawford knew that Blake had a gun in hand.

Something approaching — *something!* Padding forward like an animal? No. A rasping noise. What? Human? Or a tiny wind rubbing branch against branch? The sound again—nearer!

The two white men lay stockstill, hardly breathing, trying to control the pounding of their hearts. A steel-blue shrike dashed

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across the path, and screamed once; there was a whirr which did not come from the wings of the bird, and then the thud of the bird's body. The two men could see it lying in the path.

Blake's arm crossed Crawford's shoulder; moonlight on the barrel of the gun Blake held turned it the color of the dead bird—steel-blue.

A guttural voice now—throatily saying one single word—and then apparitions ran swiftly, noiselessly, up to the shrike. While one man ripped out the arrow and tore off the forked tail feathers, the other jerked the shrike apart, wetting the palms of their hands with the blood.

Apparitions! Awful figures from a world of bloody, horrible ghosts, laughing at their kill. *Taiyal headhunters!*

The white men could see them plainly enough—too plainly. Naked bronze bodies clothed only in the breechclouts; short, bowed legs; long, powerful, swinging arms. The savage who had ripped out arrow and feathers carried a heavy old gun; others had bows and quivers; all held krises which glinted hotly in the tropic moonlight. But what made the savages utterly terrible, nauseous, was that every man's head—there were over a dozen of them—was completely concealed in a conical wicker basket which came down to the shoulders. As if their business was so dread that they dared not be seen. For them to be able to see what they were about, a slit was cut for the eyes.

Each movement of the savages made the baskets rasp against skin—the sound which Crawford had first heard.

One of the Taiyals laughed, more like the gibbering of a baboon than any human sound, and then both watching white men froze where they lay. The savages had with one accord whirled, and were facing them. It seemed to Crawford and Blake that the slits, and the eyes behind them, stared into their own. Then, as Crawford could feel the muscles of his companion's forearm tense, they heard what had startled the savages—something crashing through the brush.

Whatever it was, the sound came nearer, and seemed directly behind them. But the keener ears of the Taiyals knew that the noise was to the left, and the basket-covered heads turned toward it.

A gaunt water buffalo ambled trustingly to the path; a Taiyal was at its throat before the beast could bellow; another of the savages squeezed the beast's nostrils together as blood spurted. The chief, who had taken no part in the proceeding, handed his ancient gun to the slightest, youngest of the party.

With the exception of the two Taiyals who silenced the water buffalo's death agonies so expertly, the remainder of the savages stared into the thicket, standing behind the young savage who grasped the gun. Then Blake and Crawford saw the bushes near them move. Before they could crouch lower, or Blake could twist about to see if one of the Taiyals had circled about them, a shadowy figure—a Formosan peasant—followed the animal to the path.

The long-barreled gun held by the youthful savage was raised; almost with the roar of its discharge the jungle woke to sound. The echo was beaten down by the wild screams of birds. If the peasant cried out at all, neither white man heard him.

Blake, mouth at Crawford's ear, whispered, "Don't look!" and Crawford closed his eyes tightly. His ears he could not shut against sound. He heard laughter, the chop of steel against bone, triumphant guttural words, and, after what seemed a long time, but could have been measured in seconds, silence. Silence so complete that the final inquiring chirps of the disturbed birds were loud.

"THEY'RE gone," Blake said very softly. "Prob'ly see more of 'em later. Nice work, old man. I could've fired with you as an arm rest. You didn't move a muscle."

"Too scared," Crawford replied. "They——"

"We'll see what they did in a minute or two," Blake said levelly. "I didn't look either, but that's what they did. Anyhow, they won't be back. Got what they were after."

The two men moved cramped arms and legs, and when the jungle was still as death

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Blake led the way to the moonlit path.

The peasant's head had been hacked from his body, and was gone. His naked chest had a great hole in it.

Blake rubbed his chin. "Not a nice way to die, is it?" he asked, without expecting an answer. "Sudden, anyhow. The Taiyals use bullets made from the heart of some hard wood. Don't know how they cure it. These bullets are only effective at short range. When they lodge in the flesh they explode like dumdums. This one did; blew him all to hell, eh? Proves one thing: this party's a lot of 'raw' savages, from the other side of the guard line, where they can't get regular bullets." Seeing Crawford staring at the headless body, Blake went on calmly, "The savages learn quickly. They buy matches from Chinese traders, who come after tortoise shell and deer horns; they cut discs from the striking side of the match boxes, put the tip of a match between 'em, and use that for caps... Feel like sleepin' now? Neither do I. The moon's up. I'll get the pack and we'll go ahead."

"No wonder my Japanese guide didn't want any of this country!" Crawford said as they started forward.

"Taiyals don't like Japs. Got a lot of Nipponese heads on their skull shelves already. Chinese traders are left alone. So are white men, usually. I don't know all the dope on collectin' heads. But a Taiyal fellow can't marry until he chops one from a dead man. Don't be afraid to talk, old man. That raidin' party'll streak for home and a celebration of their valor."

Crawford said vag[illegible] "You—men, that is—go into places like this in order to find gold."

"I'll only lose my body," Blake retorted. "Men do a lot worse tryin' to get money."

"I didn't mean that—the way it sounded," Crawford said. "Only—that wasn't a pretty sight, was it? Now, we're going to the village where the gas was ignited, and Carter died. What do we do then?"

"Probably listen to a lot of fish stories told by the Japanese who're up there, and come back no wiser than we came," Blake answered. "The Japs are supposed to be makin' a scientific report on the resources of the district, but they didn't look good to me. Diggin' [illegible] near the river, and tellin' Carter [illegible]ey were lookin' for petroleum! He [illegible]wise to 'em. I had a hunch one of [illegible]aps put the old Chinese woman up to [illegible]nin' joss by the excavation!"

"But there *was* gas there!" Crawford exclaimed.

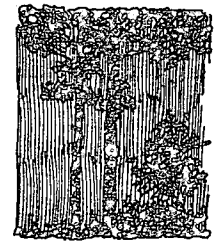
"Yeah. But they were disappointed when they found it. Gold's what they're after. And some officials in Taihoku are wise to that fact, too. That's why they didn't want you up here."

"Where did Carter get the gold?"

"The chief in the village gave it to him," Blake said soberly. "But where the chief got it I don't know."

What Blake's plan was, if the older man had one, Crawford didn't know nor ask. His own job was plain: the facts of Carter's death must be ascertained, and the matter reported. Insofar as Blake's effort to find the mysterious gold coincided with what he himself must do, he proposed to assist his companion. More, he owed Blake a double debt, for without the dark American's assistance he would have learned absolutely nothing, and, to boot, would have been either killed or misled after getting a little beyond Senkizan.

They walked in silence until Blake again left the path—this time going far from it, and selecting a clump of trees standing above a brawling stream, with bare rock surrounding the place chosen in which to rest, proving that the adventurer did not intend to be near the scene of any further Taiyal activity. Crawford, dead tired, was lulled to sleep by the roar of the water below.



III

IN THE morning they continued along the path again, although it was noon before snarling dogs tore out to meet them from the Formosan village.

Near the edge of the village was a camphor still; one camphor tree, with shapely trunk and wide spreading branches covered with graceful leaves grew near it,

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last remnant of what had been a precious group. Camphor chips, brought in to the still on coolie's back from the jungle, were in a retort over boiling water; the vapor was crystallized in submerged vats.

Crawford had no eye for any of this, despite Blake's information that the crude camphor had tremendous value. All that he could see was a long series of shelves —twenty feet long and seven shelves high —where, solidly packed, were ranged skull after skull.

From most of the skulls the jawbones were missing. All were hairless. One or two grinned a welcome to the village.

Crawford found himself, as he walked, trying to count these relics of headhunting raids. Forty-one skulls on the top row. Or forty-three. Which? Thirty-nine on the next shelf—and one little skull at the end. Didn't take a brave man to kill a youngster and chop off his head!

Flat on the camphor boards the skulls rested, the shelf above supported by the line of skulls beneath.

"Only 'raw' savages collect 'em now," Blake said, "if we believe what we're told. But look at that nice shiny one, just stripped of its flesh, at the end of the third row, New, I'll bet. Might be——"

"Shut up," Crawford growled.

"I was going to say, 'Might be the peasant's we saw killed,'" Blake told him coolly. "Pretty sure it isn't Carter's, old man. If it were—er—you goin' to take—it—back with you?"

Shortly, "Bury it."

"Better way," Blake agreed. "Here comes Kim Ami. Headman."

The village headman was approaching, an old tatooed Taiyal whose hair was white. From the waist down he was naked; the upper part of his body was clothed in a black silk jacket. Beads of bone and hard red berries circled his scrawny neck.

While Blake and Kim Ami talked, in broken Japanese with Chinese words intermingled, Crawford glanced about. Slate roofed huts, with skulls hanging from the rafters. Doorways painted with obscene figures. One large hut, with Taiyal men crouched about a pot of food; no skulls hung there at all, and Crawford guessed rightly that it was the bachelor dormitory.

Above the hum of Blake's and Kim Ami's voices, above the grunt of hogs and snarl of dogs circling the food pot, Crawford heard the steady, monotonous clink of metal striking rock. That must be the Japanese "scientific" expedition.

"Kim Ami says that the raiding party didn't come from this village," Blake said finally. "He tells me that as far as he's concerned, we're welcome, but that the Japs were so glad to see me leave that they may not care to see me come back. Forewarned. Eyes on the boat from now on, old man. No sightseein' unless I'm with you."

"About Carter——"

"I've laid that on thick. You hired me to bring you here, so you could find out what happened. Got any papers from Taihoku to prove you've actually got permission? That'd help, especially with the—*scientists!*"

"That guide had 'em."

"I should've searched him," Blake grumbled. "Oh, well, let's amble over and see what they've been doin' since I left. Kim Ami says they've got a couple of holes now."

"Did you ask the headman about Carter's—body?" Crawford almost said, "about his head," but stopped in time.

"Umm. He didn't seem to care for the question. Try again later. He and Carter seemed friendly enough, before. See what I can find out soon."

Side by side the white men walked through the village. The last huts were almost sliding down a ravine, at the bottom of which a river rushed. Here men were working, but Blake pointed to the top of the ridge on the other side of the ravine.

"See the open space? Like a fire line? That's the *aiyu-sen.* Guard line. Only 'raw' savages on the far side. The line runs along the ridges. It's supposed to give protection from raids. Got an electrified fence and everything, but the Taiyals —well, you saw what they still can do."

The men working between villageward rimrock and brawling stream had given over all pretense of geological examination. A sluicebox was being actively worked. One Oriental, clad only in breechclout and

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headband of red cloth, shoveled gravel into the upper box. Others carried buckets from the top of a shaft in unending procession, where a crude windlass brought the gravel and fine black sand to the surface.

"Mineral concessions belong to the Japanese government," Blake said. "Discoverer rewarded with a percentage. These boys are hogs. The gas came out of a shaft a couple of hundred feet below. See the mound of dirt there? That's what finished Carter. And the old Chino woman who burned the joss— Here comes the boss, Crawford."

FOR a moment Crawford thought that the approaching man was Japanese, and then saw his mistake. What mongrel blood flowed in the fellow's veins was proven by his delicate Malayan build, his bluish green Caucasian shaped eyes with only a pencil of eyebrow above—a Eurasian. He wasted no words on the white men.

"Kio wa de nai no ni doshite?" the Eurasian demanded in bad Japanese. "Why are you back?"

"My friend has been ordered to return to Tokyo with what remains of the other white man," Blake said.

The Eurasian stared insolently at Crawford a moment, and then said, "And you?"

"I am his guide." Blake answered the question very quietly.

"Then guide him back to Taihoku again!" the Eurasian growled.

Crawford's long arm shot out and gripped the Eurasian by his gaudy silk jacket.

The Eurasian howled several words to his Oriental workmen. Buckets were dropped; the man at the upper box came running, shovel in hand; knives appeared from nowhere. A distant worker hurled a rock at the white men.

"If he opens his mouth again, shoot him," Crawford said to Blake.

"All ready to do it," the other returned, the steel-blue gun in his hand.

The Oriental with the shovel was circling behind the Americans; on the cliff above villagers, Formosans, Chinese, and every shade between, watched the proceeding with interest.

"You want to get rid of us," Crawford said swiftly to the Eurasian imprisoned in his grip. "I want the white engineer's body. Or what's left. I don't care about your gold. Talk fast, cowface. And tell your men to back up, unless you want to see which heaven you're going to."

Shouting, "Wait!" to the motley, naked workers, the Eurasian said, "He was scattered to the skies. That was the end of him."

Blake said thoughtfully, "I'm afraid he's right, old man. I was here, you know." He swung about in a half circle, gun out, and the man with the shovel backed further away as the gun pointed at his naked middle. "But you might ask how there's gas in gold country."

Did the Eurasian's eyes waver?

Crawford thought they did. His grip tightened, his blue eyes darkened. "How'd you fix the hole so Carter would be killed?" he demanded. To Blake; "That's what he did!"

As Crawford said the last words to his companion, his grip on the Eurasian must have loosened an instant; he must have automatically turned his head to look at the other white man. In that same fraction of time the Eurasian slid out of his bright jacket and screamed a command; Blake's gun fired at the nearest danger point—the wielder of the shovel—and the man leaped high, and fell.

Crawford had the shovel before the slain Oriental stopped writhing, and jumped back to Blake's side.

The Eurasian had run out of pistol-shot range, going from boulder to boulder, and yelling as he ran; the workers, scum of a dozen Oriental ports, did not rush the two white men, but circled around them, cutting off escape up the cliff. Workers were up the river, and below them; Blake's searching eyes followed the running half-caste, and then saw where he was going, and why. Beside one of the shaft mouths leaned a rifle....

Once only the two white men looked at each other; as if determined upon the same plan, they started toward the river; none blocked the way. The icy water swirled up to their thighs; Crawford stum-

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bled once—luckily, for at that moment the Eurasian fired, and the bullet sang above him. A second and third shot went wild, and then the white men, legs bruised, scrambled across a narrow patch of gravel, hurled their bodies up the steep rimrock, and, breathless, dropped behind the same boulder above.

"Can't stop," Blake gasped. "Wriggle after me. Rock's between us and Jap. Get into woods."

On their bellies the white men wormed their way upward into the wooded ravine's side. The Eurasian's rifle filled the canyon with echoes, but the shots were sent after them in anger, and not because the halfcaste saw a mark to shoot at.

"How — far—better—go?" Crawford choked.

"Skunk might—try comin' after us," replied Blake.

They hastened a full half mile above the gold workings before Blake was willing to stop.

"Welcome to our city," he grinned finally. "The cowards won't come any deeper into savage territory. See the sky? That's where the guard line's been cleared."

"Out of the fryin' pan," Crawford laughed. "What next? Wait until it's dark and then cross again?"

"Only thing to do. Try hitting the trail back to Senkizan. Too many of 'em. My best bet's going back to Yokohama and swappin' information for a share of gold. If you don't mind, you might—er—sort of sponsor me, old man. I haven't got much standing in the Orient any more."

Crawford said briefly, "Little enough to do." And then, "Don't know how I guessed it, but that swine managed it so Carter was blown to bits. I—I didn't like running away from him, Blake."

"Umm. That's why there're so many dead white men in the tropics," Blake told Crawford. "Because they didn't run. There's a time to fight, and a time to beat it. We'd have been hacked to pieces if we stayed. Fifty against two's poor odds. A knife's a knife, no matter who does the carvin'... As far as my findin' Carter's gold, that's out. All we want to do is get back to Senkizan." Thoughtfully, "May not be so easy—if they send men along the bank. If——"

Crawford's hand was over his companion's mouth; the two men stared into the jungle, but saw nothing.

"You can't tell where a shot comes from," Blake said at last. "It echoes up and down. But——"

"Sounded as if it were above us," hazarded Crawford. "To the north—if that's north."

"Yeah—there's another one."

A muffled noise, like a great army of crickets in autumn, came to the two men.

"Machine gun," Blake said briefly. "Taiyals havin' a crack at a guardhouse, and the Jap soldiers are protestin' about it."

Crawford said as lightly as he could, "This's a nice place to spend the summer."

"Isn't it? On one side a lot of murderous Japs inspired with gold lust. On the other a few thousand headhunters. Us in the middle. It's—it's a hell of a prospect, old man."

IV

HOW desperate it was they learned when night came. Up and down the river the Eurasian had lit fires; he must have had his men drag brush to the water's edge all afternoon, for as far as the beleaguered white men could see, the river sparkled in ruddy light.

Crawford wondered how long the Eurasian would keep up his search, and his effort to keep them from recrossing the river, returning to Taihoku, and reporting what was going on. One thing he was determined to do: to charge the halfcaste with Carter's murder. How the devil had generated an explosive gas in a shaft he didn't know, but he was absolutely certain that it had been done.

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"Tomorrow, or tomorrow night—" he began.

"That's out," Blake said wearily. "No go. The fires'll attract every Taiyal for miles, out of sheer curiosity. I'll bet the village drums are beatin' right now. You can't find a needle in a haystack, old man, but the Taiyals'll guess what our Eurasian friend's about, and they'll find us! You can have your choice: a try at crossin' the river and bein' potted, or sneak up near the guard line and findin' a post of Jap soldiers. We can't stay here."

Crawford said, "If we've got to die, I'll be hanged if I want the Eurasian to boast about killing us."

Standing up, Blake said, "I didn't think that damned Eurasian was so little afraid of the savages that he'd risk attracting their attention. I'll bet he's one of those boys who carry on a trade in ammunition and powder with 'em. Or did, until he fell on the gold. It doesn't make much difference. Ready?"

For a few minutes Blake advanced cautiously, and then he stopped.

"Look here," he said; "the best chance we've got is to hurry north, keeping this side of the *aiyu-sen*. The Taiyals'll do a couple of dances before they come to see what the fun's about. We know they attacked a guardhouse earlier. Maybe they're still surroundin' it; maybe not. But I'd say the thing to do is to have a run for it. If there're Taiyals about, they get us. But...."

Crawford, saving his breath, nodded.

It was terrible going. Trailing vines tripped them, knocking the breath from their laboring lungs. Thorned bushes clutched at them. Aiming for the cleared guard line, they intended skirting it, concealed in the jungle, until they came to the Japanese post. The *aiyu-sen* always was on the top of the ridges; they worked their way upward. At last the odorous jungle changed suddenly to almost sheer rock. They altered their course, following the traversable lower edge. It was dark in the ravine, for all the sky above was shot with stars.

Soon Blake, in the lead, said, "We're in luck at last!"

They had stumbled over a steep steplike path made of wood slatted together, so steep that it was almost a ladder, and they hastened up, certain that it led toward the guard post. The top of the ravine was in sight, outlined black against the sky, when both men stopped swiftly.

"What was that about luck?" Crawford asked in a whisper.

What had stopped them was a shot; it was repeated instantly, and followed by wild yells which echoed up and down the ravine.

"Let's have a look-see," Blake suggested. "Whatever's up, nobody'll be lookin' for visitors. And there's no sense goin' back."

Up the ladder-path they clambered. They reached the top side by side, and, clinging to the last rung, looked over the knifelike edge once, and then flattened down against the wood.

The *aiyu-sen* was not at the top of this ridge at all, but on the top of the next, a full four hundred feet away. Between ridges swung a rattan suspension bridge, and in the chasm below water roared downward, a thread of silver in the moonlight. It was not this swaying structure, delicate as a spider web, that sent the two white men out of sight, but what they saw at the far side of the bridge.

As Crawford said, "I take that back about luck; it may work out fine," they looked over the rock top a second time, but very carefully.

What they saw was this:

THE slender suspension bridge swayed uneasily; fifteen or more Japanese soldiers were crossing it, single file, clinging to the rattan handrail. More whiteclad soldiers were at the far end of the bridge, where it was fastened about great smooth rocks, and these guards—*aiyue*— were firing through the electrified fence. What marks they saw neither white men knew, although once a scream showed that one of the bullets must have found a mark.

From the guardhouse itself, fifty feet away from the bridge on the far side of the ravine, a machine gun rattled away, spraying death into the jungle. But despite this careful preparation and covering of the men making their slow way across the

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bridge, the yells of the Taiyals never ceased, and, as the watching white men stared over the edge of the ridge, they saw one of the soldiers clutch at his throat, saw, with the uncanny sight of intent men, the silver flicker of the eagle feather at the end of the arrow.

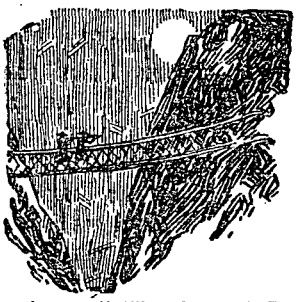
The soldier nearest the hit guard grabbed for him, missed his own footing on the bridge; there was a tangle of arms and legs, and then Blake and Crawford saw two bodies slide through the rattan "V" made by the hand ropes and foot rope, and hurtle to the white water and rocks below in the chasm.

The rattan bridge swayed and shook; an officer with the retreating party of Japanese soldiers must have given a command, for the remaining men continued across the treacherous way. The din of the Taiyals grew every moment. Crisp crackle of Japanese rifles and roar of old contraband guns, the thrumming of the machine gun, beat up and down the canyon.

When the slow-moving *aiyue* were almost in the middle of the bridge, the cries of the savages increased deafeningly. Despite the keen fire of the Japanese, a horde of savages dragged a tree trunk toward the fence, pulled it upright, and dropped it across; the white men could not see the hand-to-hand fight which was taking place, and which only stopped when the machine gun was trained on friend and enemy alike; then the Taiyals melted away, and the survivors ran for the cover of the jungle again.

The retreating soldiers on the bridge were three quarters of the way across now, hurried on by the commands of the officer who brought up the rear; Crawford and Blake both wondered how to make their presence known as friends when one spoken word, very close, made them still as the rock against which their bodies were pressed.

What the word was or meant they did not know, nor could they see who uttered it. From the gutturally triumphant voice, they knew it came from a Taiyal. How many of them were there? Hardly turning their heads, they looked for the spot where the rattan bridge was secured on their side of the ravine. Rock and shrub assumed human shape. Then they saw the fragile



suspension bridge shake tremulously, fearfully, and sag where the weight of the guardsmen pulled it down. A Japanese soldier shouted *"Abunai you!"* "Look out! Savages!" Like flies the *aiyue* clung to the shivering rattan handrails, trying to hurry across. One fired at nothing, and, losing balance, fell, to clutch the foot rope fiercely, while his panicky fellows stepped hastily over him.

One of the three rattan suspension ropes of the bridge had been hacked away by the Taiyals on the same side of the ravine as the two white men.

The savages on the far side of the ravine must have seen, for they began to yowl and scream in triumph. From the end of the bridge, near the white men, came an answering shriek, and with it the upward flash of a kris.

The officer must have fired, but only a savage burst of laughter greeted his shot. The Japanese on the other side, four hundred feet away, had all they could do in stopping a new rush of the Taiyals.

It was all so fast that less than a minute passed before Blake's dark eyes and Crawford's blue ones met. They nodded at the same instant, and, caution useless, sprang over the top of the ridge. Blake fired at the glint of the kris, Crawford, not pausing, landed squarely atop of a slippery naked body.

Crawford tried to crush the Taiyal beneath him, and smashed down once with his fist, but hit only rock; he had one glimpse of a fiendish face, and then went sick with pain as jagged, sharpened fangs tore at his forearm.

Blake, carrying on his attack, had fired once more, very close, and then a knife blade had ripped the gun from his hand. But with the other fist Blake had smashed the second Taiyal over the heart and then pressed him against the rocks; they stood together as if locked, the Taiyal unable to pull away, Blake unable to do more—with

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only one hand—than hold the savage so he could not stab again. The Taiyal had the advantage, tearing ruthlessly away at Blake's shoulder with his sharp teeth, but the big white man never gave back, but pressed his opponent closer to the rock.

Crawford's hand slid over the Taiyal's oiled body until one hand met the breechclout; he yanked at this, pulling the savage from beneath him, felt a searing burn as the Taiyal's knife ripped upward, and then swung the savage furiously from the ground, while with the other hand he grabbed at the first thing it might meet. It was the savage's knife arm.

Crawford heard the Japanese soldiers shouting as they came nearer, heard Blake tell, "Stick with him!" and then saw that the Taiyal was trying to swing him toward the edge of the ravine. Stronger than the savage, Crawford jerked him close, and, body to body, held him. The stinking headhunter was twisted in a half circle, held upright by Crawford's grip on his breechclout, and twisted to the side by the grasping hand holding his knife arm. The Taiyal was unable to use the weapon save for futile little sidewise digs.

Crawford put desperate grim pressure in his two-way hold. A wrench at the savage's arm. A harder one. All the time keeping his grip on the belt about the Taiyal's thighs as tight as he could. Once more Crawford wrenched....

Crawford thought, as the Taiyal went limp, that the sound he heard was either Blake or one of the Japanese firing, and then, somehow, he knew that it had been a snapped arm bone. Instinct told him to hurl the savage over the cliff, reason made him drop the body and jerk around. His fist cracked the Taiyal gnawing at Blake's shoulder so hard that a tooth remained in the big American's shoulder.

AS BLAKE shoved the unconscious Taiyal away, and turned a white, haggerd face toward Crawford, one of the Japanese shouted again, *"Abunai yo!* Look out!"

There was no killing the savage whose arm Crawford had broken. Although it was hanging uselessly, the Taiyal crawled toward the two white men. Spume flecked his lips, but on he came for revenge.

"I—I can't kill him," Crawford said. "He's got—guts."

Both white men backed away as the Taiyal crawled toward them, but the first Japanese *aiyue* to step swiftly from the bridge—making his fellows cling to the remaining handrail like monkeys—fired instantly into the savage's body, and then kicked it down to the roaring rapids and boulders below.

"That's our trouble—white men's trouble," Blake said. "We count fiendishness as bravery. All he wanted to do was kill us, and insure himself a heavenly home. You—you all right, old man?"

Crawford, nodding, said, "Your hand's—" and then the crowding, jubilant *aiyue* prevented other words.

The Taiyals seemed to have had enough, even before the Japanese guard officer had his men fire across the ravine into the jungle. They still screamed and howled valiantly enough, but the sight of the guardsmen safely across the rattan bridge must have disheartened them. Their guns no longer shook the chasm with sound, although the sharp crack of the Japanese weapons continued searching for brown bodies among the black trunks in the wood.

The officer cupped his hands, and having one of his men fire four times, shouted across the ravine to the guardhouse. Both Crawford and Blake heard the reply: *"Ikaremasu! Hayaku!"*

The Japanese officer had been told to go ahead.

Turning to the white men, he said, "You understand Japanese? Good! I am very sorry you have seen such a depressing sight, but very thankful to you! I go to the village below; you will come with me? After, when we come back, I take you to our post, if that is where you wish to go." Curiosity was mingled with gratefulness as he added, "Why did you come? But I thank all the gods that you did!"

"The village is where we want to go," Blake said.

The officer's face showed his surprise. "But you were coming to the post!"

As they climbed down the rough ladder-like steps, guardsmen ahead and behind, the white men explained briefly why they

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had come to the village, omitting that part of the tale which had to do with the gold. Crawford did most of the talking. He ended by saying:

"Our engineer named Carter was murdered. *Hiyoko wa karesu ni torareta.* There is something wrong with this affair."

"I agree," the officer said grimly. "Very wrong. My captain was told by that expert in rocks, that Eurasian who killed your countryman that he feared an attack by the savages this night. He said this two days ago. Information, according to him, trickled to him by a 'tame' savage. *Hai-ya!* And so we are sent to protect the village, and are attacked in the rear, with plans ready to chop the bridge down where we would least expect it. If you had not arrived, we would by now be on the way to heaven. However"—smiling—"we are instead going to the village, where perhaps we can create a little hell of our own. It may prove very interesting."

Blake walked with his hand held to his shoulder to ease the pain, Crawford was whistling between his teeth. Neither had spoken directly to the other after the first word, yet the two white men felt close in thought and spirit. Crawford almost nodded acquiescence as Blake suddenly laid his cards on the table:

"The Eurasian digs for gold. And that is why I came, honorable officer. For gold."

The Japanese tramped steadily ahead before saying mildly, "It is against the law to dig for gold."

"All my friend and I want now is a safe return," Blake said.

"And revenge," the little officer suggested.

Both white men, thinking of Carter and the Eurasian who had so cleverly murdered him, nodded.

When they were again where they could see fires leaping along the river below the village, Crawford asked the Japanese officer: "Your men have revolvers, honorable officer. Is it permitted that you let us each have one?"

"I had thought," the little officer said very politely, "of asking you to put on uniforms. You are both long in the leg and too white of face, but we can remedy that."

The party halted. The two largest Japanese guardsmen unstripped leggings and took off their bandoleers and long grayish-white coats, which covered their uniforms from neck to below the knee. While other *aiyue* wound the canvas strips about the white men's legs, the Japanese officer himself rubbed moistened clay carefully on their faces. When he had completed the job to his satisfaction, and Crawford and Blake were in the guardsmen's attire, with straw sun hats pulled down almost midway across the bridge of the nose, they might have passed, save for the difference in height, for one of the Japanese.

"When we cross the river and come to the village, keep among my men," the officer suggested. "In the dark, you will pass for Japanese soldiers. And it is really necessary to allow our bloodthirsty friend to say too much. After that...."

"You will send him to Taihoku?" Crawford asked.

The officer said, "If that is done, it will be necessary for me to accompany him, and—well, I have other business. The matter is best settled here."

Both white men knew what the Japanese officer meant.

V

WHERE the path came to the river, just above the village, a crude narrow foot bridge spanned the water. A fire tended by one of the workers lit the gravel bank fitfully; when the party of guardsmen started across, this man called out loudly; and several of his fellows of the "scientific" expedition, together with the Eurasian, ran up from where they had been watching nearer the village.

"*Hai-ya!*" the Eurasian shouted; "Oh honorable officer, I am glad that you came, You can see that we are prepared to defend the village, but now that you are here, all is well."

The officer bowed deeply. "I am very glad to be of service," he said, and nothing more.

"I will mention it to the proper authorities when I return to my university in Tokyo," the Eurasian promised. "But tell me: we thought we heard guns. Has there been trouble in the hills?"

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"Nothing at all, nothing at all," the officer responded blithely. "My men, it is true, heard a noise near the guard line, and, thinking it might be Taiyals, fired. However, it was only a couple of hairy foreigners."

Crawford and Blake, standing well in the rear of the guardsmen, saw the question the Eurasian wanted to ask. In the light of the fire, the Eurasian's face was a puzzle. Expectancy and cruel hope was mixed with fearful doubt, which changed subtly to satisfaction as the officer continued placidly:

"By now they are very dead," he said. "I must make a report of it. 'Killed by savages' I will write, and that will be the end of the business. The government does not care for *keto-jin* nosing into our affairs. I admit I wondered what they were doing near the guard line."

"You can say that I, Harusaru Moshigara, forced the hairy ones out of the village when I discovered them making trouble with the native women," the Eurasian obligingly said. "I regret—you can say that also—that they were killed, but I made every effort to set them on the right trail toward Senkizan."

"I am sure of that," said the Japanese officer.

"Will you come to the village?" The Eurasian invited. Voice lower, "I have a bottle of electric brandy which will be excellent after your walk, honorable officer. Perhaps you will——"

"I thought," the wiry Japanese officer said amiably enough, "that you are awaiting an attack by the headhunters?"

Crawford smothered a grin; Blake choked down an ejaculation of pleasure. The officer was certainly letting the Eurasian hang himself.

But the Eurasian was seemingly not at loss. "Now that you are here," he said, "Taiyal spies will report that the village is under your protection, and we are safe."

The white men fought not to change expression at the air of pleased pomposity the wise Nipponese officer assumed as he said, "That is true. I am here. Since I am to have some excellent brandy, I am lucky to be here."

"Very lucky," the Eurasian agreed dryly.

"The Taiyals trouble us little," the officer said, after ordering his command to follow him to the village. "This is the first hint of trouble—that they intended to attack the village. Soon we will have them under control completely."

"I am sure of it," stated the Eurasian. "What can you expect of savages who—well, who do not know one day from another? Who cannot count up to three?"

"That hooks our Eurasian friend," Crawford whispered in Blake's ear. "And he did it all himself. Showed that he arranged the attack. Why?"

Blake guessed correctly, shrewdly. "Added to his hold over 'em. Been sellin' opium for gold. Showing the savages he hates the Japs. More gold."

"Shikkari shiro!" the Japanese officer cried. "Silence!"

The village was dark and silent, although before the bachelor dormitory Formosans sat smoking, the bowls of their little pipes glowing as they puffed. None rose to greet the party of *aiyue*. The moonlight slanted off the slate roofs until they looked like sheets of steel.

The Eurasian led the way to a hut next to the village chief's—who was crouching under the heads hanging over his low doorway—and talked continually. About Tokyo. Of the geological experiments he was conducting, which would bring great credit to his university and the whole Empire. Of—repeatedly—his thanks to the officer. Even about the white man named Carter, who had become officious and annoying and was killed by his very curiosity.

"That was cleverly done," the Japanese officer praised as they stopped before the Eurasian's hut.

"I see you like the white men as little as I," the Eurasian laughed. "But I content myself by saying it was—an accident. It is better so."

The Japanese officer gave his orders

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briefly. The guardsmen, all except the two "recruits," were to unroll their blanket-packs by the tree above the cliff. The customary sentinels were to be posted. The two "recruits," however, were to stay with the officer as he had some instructions to give them which the other *aiyue* already knew. And so Crawford and Blake followed Japanese officer and Eurasian plotter into the low hut.

A RAPE seed oil lamp flickered and flared; the white men's incognito would be well preserved inside, as the little Japanese officer knew it would be. Both white men were on edge. By his own admission, the Eurasian had murdered Carter. Doubly, he had tried to murder them. And in the third place, as the little officer knew also, he had tried to have the Japanese detachment—and the Japanese soldiers at the post—killed by the Taiyals. The little officer was content to let the Eurasian entangle himself perfectly, but the white men were anxious for matters to be brought to a head.

The little officer squatted on the heap of rags serving as floor covering while the Eurasian went to a box in a corner of the room. He found four glasses, and filled them to the brim; when he handed one each to the Americans, they mumbled their thanks in Japanese but kept their heads, concealed well by the straw military hats, well down.

"Sa!" the Eurasian hissed. "Let us drink to the souls of the hairy foreigners—and wish them an unhappy journey on the way to hell!"

Crawford, as well as Blake, had had enough. Crawford shoved the sun hat from his head so that it dropped behind him, and said loudly: "Let's drink to their bodies, and to your trip to hell!"

The lamp, at that moment, flared high. For an instant everyone in the hut seemed fastened to the floor—the moment while the Japanese officer, not expecting impetuous action from the white men, was unprepared; the moment the Eurasian saw yellow hair and blazing blue eyes. And then all four men sprang. Three for the Eurasian. The Eurasian for the lamp—and the room was black as the pit.

Twice Blake and Crawford grabbed each other. The little Jap officer was shouting fiercely, and then somehow all three men knew that the Eurasian, knowing its position better than they, had managed to get out through the low door of the hut.

The officer fired his pistol; *aiyue* came tearing through the crooked street of the village, their rifles ready for action. The braves before the dormitory had bows and krises and short handled axes now; one of them took a cut at a running guardsman. Then the headman cried a wild word, and grabbed the officer by the arm. In his broken, difficult Japanese he said:

"Man—he head—like. Man——"

The Japanese officer giving his swift orders to his guardsmen, shook the headman off.

"Won't find him," Blake growled at Crawford.

And then Crawford knew what the headman was yammering at the little officer. *Heads!* The long shelves of heads! Why? No matter. Whatever was done, it had to be done fast. Jerking the chief by the shoulder, he asked that question, and the withered old man pointed.

Crawford started running, hindered by the long summer-duty military coat until he tucked it above his knees. Blake shouted after him once, and then sprang to follow his companion.

Clear through the village Crawford tore, Blake nearly a hundred feet behind him.

Crawford had thrown away his rifle when he ran from the hut, but Blake, burdened with his, lost ground step by step. The trees circling the village—no, he wasn't out of the town; there was the open space in which the heads, row on row, grinned whitely in the tropic moonlight. Crawford raced across the flat. There was the horrible collection, but no sight of the murdering Eurasian.

Clear to the end of the "head" shelves Crawford went; just as he was about to turn and go back to the village a gun cracked, and with the sound the skull near Crawford's head was knocked from the shelf. It dropped on the American's foot, and gave it a blow almost as crippling as that from a sledgehammer; Crawford fell face forward as a second and third

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shot sang over his head.

As he dropped, Crawford could hear the little Jap officer screaming to the guardsmen, heard the discharge, near and loud, of another gun, and then before he could get to his feet Blake was pulling him up, shouting in his ear: "Where'd he get you?"

"He didn't!" Crawford shouted. "Where'd he go? He'll try——"

"Go? I can guess. Try? He's tried his last, old man."

As the Japanese officer and his guardsmen stormed up, Crawford saw that the dark blotch on the beaten clay about the skull shelf wasn't shadow, but the body of the Eurasian. Gripping Blake's hand, he said, "Thanks. What the chief said made me——"

"I was dumb," Blake retorted. "I——"

"Why he came to the skulls——"

"You found the skunk, old man; that's the big thing."

THE little Jap officer had run past the white men, and turned the Eurasian over. The officer said quietly, "He is completely dead," and then, to Crawford, "You are the quickest man I have ever seen! First in your running, and next in the way you dropped when the devil shot at you!"

"He hit the skull," Crawford said, pointing down. "It was knocked off, and I tripped over it. Seemed heavy; must have been the way it hit me."

"It is a fresh skull, from a large man," the officer said. "And—why not keep it as a souvenir, since it saved your life?"

Crawford stooped, but when he came to pick up the skull his eyes went wide with surprise. "So that's why the devil liked heads," he said slowly.

He held the skull up. Even the most stolid guardsman hissed incredulously. The moonlight, shining through the holes where the eyes had once been, showed that inside the skull there was packed a dully gleaming metal. *Gold!*

"And there are more," the Japanese officer said, looking at other skulls. "The Formosans never come to the 'head' shelf except to bring a new head; they would never see. It was well planned. When the Eurasian took them away, who would examine skulls when owned by a 'scientist'? The Eurasian would have said he was taking them for scientific examination by a brother 'professor'! *Mah!* Now, whose gold is it? I think, my friends, that after what you have done for the Emperor's guardsmen, my report to Tokyo will convince them that the gold belongs to you."

Crawford said sharply to Blake: "It's a differently shaped head. The others are flatter on top, and...."

The headman had at last puffed up to the clearing on his ancient legs; behind him were the bronzed, naked figures of the armed villagers. Only once the chief looked toward the Eurasian's body, and then he spat toward it feelingly. His skinny fingers touching the skull Crawford held, he said to the officer, apologetically: *"S'joji,"* and, just as crudely, "man dead — kill. Make skull."

The cold, smooth bone seemed to burn Crawford's fingers. *"S'joji"*—what was that? What Japanese word—why, *"seipo-jin". White man!* A white man's skull; a white man killed by the Eurasian. *Carter!*

While the skull's gold filled eye sockets seemed to stare at him, Crawford said suddenly, aloud, "You saved my life, Carter. You——"

"I shot over your head, when the skull knocked you down," Blake broke in. "I think Carter's played a part in his own revenge, old man."

Unconsciously, the white men had shifted to English words. The little Jap officer, curious enough, said only, "It is over. There still remains that bottle of brandy. After I try some of it on one of the Eurasian's workmen, will you join me, my friends?"

Blake with the rifle under his arm, Crawford carrying the murdered—and revenged—white man's head, they walked side by side back to the village.

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A Baseball Glove and a Hot Temper Lead Smack into the Prize Ring

The GREAT I AM

By MILLARD WARD

Author of "Trial Horse," "The Challenger," etc.

I FIRST became acquainted with John Herbert Watson when he was a rookie outfielder, reporting to the Red Wings' training camp near San Antonio for a tryout. His gray checked suit was some sizes too small for his hundred and eighty pounds of beef, and his straw hat had either been rained on or else was made half an inch thick. Also one of his cheeks was swelled up as if he'd won that old bet about getting a pool ball into his mouth.

As soon as he came on the field I said to him, "Hey, you! You better see a dentist before you try to play ball around here."

He blinked a couple of times and opened the other side of his mouth.

"I don't need to see no dentist, and I don't try to play ball. I play it."

I saw then that it was merely the world's biggest quid of tobacco he had in his mouth. I understood better the first time I saw him refill. Two ten-cent plugs at a time was nothing to him.

And he was right about playing ball. He

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did play it, but principally he hit it. He had a curious, loose-muscled swing at bat with a long follow through and I'd never seen anything but a golf ball travel the way a ball did when he landed on it. His average for the training season was .480, and as he could chase flies as well as the rest and had an arm like a trench mortar, the right field job was his when we pulled back up North to open the season.

We had the same gang that had finished a hot second in the league the year before, and with this additional punch we couldn't see anything but World's Series money ahead. But from the start Watson did not fit in any too well personally; he had a good many rough edges and he soon got into that well known jam of acting tough because he wasn't popular, and of being still more unpopular because of acting tough.

I had had, maybe, a little more experience with that kind of thing than the players had, and when I asked him to room with me, he seemed glad. We got along all right, but he kept on passing for a hard guy outside. He looked the part; six feet two, close-waved red hair, a beak nose and wide, straight mouth. His skin was burned fiery red by that Texas sun, and, if you happened to bump against him, it was like hitting the edge of a door. When he found that very few of the other boys chewed tobacco and that some of them had been to college, he made his own quid bigger than ever, if that was possible. He was young, not over twenty-two.

In the regular season he kept on just the way he had started in Texas. He was not a great home run hitter in fenced parks, but he would lace the ball against the bottom of the boards about twice out of five times, day in and day out, and I've more than once seen an infielder turn a perfect somersault after pulling down one of his drives. He was quiet on the field that first part of the season, never answered any kidding or put up a word of argument with an umpire.

By the first of June we were way out in front with the only threat of competition coming from the Leopards, the same outfit which had beaten us the year before. There was never any love lost between the two teams, and the main reason the Leopards had beaten us was that they razzed the hide off a couple of our young pitchers and bluffed the rest of the crowd to a standstill. Our manager never encouraged rough stuff and he liked the boys to act like gentlemen all the time, but that was certainly wasted on the Leopards.

THE Leopards' catcher was the worst of the lot, a big Dutchman called Al Macht. He spent as much time finding out what names got opposing players' goats as Christy Mathewson used to spend finding out what they couldn't hit. And Macht added to that a fine line of bat tipping, walking on feet and what not.

Of course, as soon as Watson began to lead the league in batting, Macht picked him out for special attention. But for a long time he couldn't get anywhere. I would see a hot look in Watson's eye sometimes when he came in from bat, but he said nothing.

Then one day, when we were playing in the Leopards' park, Watson dropped his bat without the slightest warning, the count three and two on him, knocked off Macht's mask and slapped him across the face so you could hear it in the dugout. I knew Macht had been talking to him, but I hadn't been able to hear anything. Macht jumped up, body protector and all, and stepped into Watson. Like most of these scraps that start on the field, it didn't last long. Macht's body protector helped him in a way, but also it slowed him up, and just as the cops were getting within reach, Watson brought him down hard with a right to the chin. Macht wasn't out, but he was willing to let the game go on, and so were the cops. But the fans rode Watson hard and slung a few bottles onto the field.

When he came in to the dugout after scoring a run on a triple, and a sacrifice fly, I hailed him.

"What was the idea of smacking the Dutchman? What did he call you, anyhow?"

Watson glanced at me out of the corners of his eyes. "It wasn't nothing. But he kept it up too long, that's all."

That was the end of it until he and I

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were leaving the locker room after the game a little behind the rest of the team. Outside the door a half dozen lads rose up out of nowhere and surrounded us—you know the way a mob starts trouble—and I saw they were all the Leopards' tough boys.

The biggest one stood square in front of Watson.

"You're the pretty mean baby from Texas, ain't you?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Watson, "I'm the pretty mean baby from Texas. What's it to you?"

The others were drawing in all the time, closer and closer, and I knew in about twenty seconds we'd get it.

I thought Watson wouldn't have any idea what to expect in a jam like that. But I had hardly gotten my mouth open, with some idea of stalling them off, when Watson suddenly let his right go, and the big bird went down and out. Then the rest jumped us. Watson never waited to be fouled; he went in from the start with

feet and hands and knees and elbows: I may be past forty, but the rheumatism hasn't got me yet and I put in a nickle's worth myself. By the time we reached the sidewalk, Watson's coat had a sleeve torn out and his face was marked up a good bit, but three of the Leopards were on the ground and the other three didn't follow us outside the park.

When we got back to the hotel, I found Watson had been hurt more than I thought; nothing serious but a good general beating. And beginning then I noticed the change that made him into the bird you read about in the papers.

He talked to me in the room less and less and he talked outside more and more. He kept on leading the league in batting and he never let anybody be in doubt about it. He started working on the umpires, and every argument he got into he would settle by asking the other bird out in the alley. Being in the papers all the time anyhow on account of his hitting, it did 't take his name as a scrapper long to get over the country.

IN ALL the other teams in the league if anybody thought he could scrap, and most teams have one or more such, he would start trouble with Watson and they would get together under the grandstand. Every time Watson would win; he had no science to speak of, but he could hit and, while he always fought fair, he looked meaner somehow in action than plenty of really dirty fighters. Of course he didn't pick these fights, they were forced on him, but he got the credit for picking them and he was always willing to accept it. After a while there was no ball player left who would take him on at all.

By August all the papers were calling him "The Great I-Am" and "John Herbert (the Mighty) Watson" and stuff like that. The sportswriters never rode him really hard; they were too glad to get somebody in the slack summer season to write about, but in some towns, especially the Leopards' town, the fans were good and nasty. Watson never said anything, but I could tell that they got under his skin sometimes.

The Leopards were beating everybody in the league but us that year, and they kept close on our heels all summer. Then at last we woke up, you might say, and found the season almost over and the Leopards only two games behind us. They'd cut that to one when we reached their field for the final four games series of the regular season.

For the opening game there was a bigger crowd and a wilder crowd on hand than you sometimes find for the World's Series. The Leopards were on their toes, too. While they were warming up they'd talk loud among themselves and look over at us and laugh. And among the crowd around their dugout there was a lad I didn't recognize. He was over six feet tall and had as pretty a build as I've ever seen. His face was not bad looking, either, but his eyes were small and laughing all the time. I don't like a bird that laughs all the time. I wouldn't trust him ten seconds. Somebody said he was named Sweeny, an infielder from the West Coast League. He had a glove in his hip pocket but he never went

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on the field or even threw a ball around. It didn't look like they were going to use him.

We were batting first and the Leopards were in the field and the umpire dusting off the plate when all at once Sweeny stood up in their dugout and shouted over, "Hey, Watson, you big hobo!"

Watson was sitting beside me; his head came up with a jerk. "Steady, kid," I said. "You ain't going to be thick enough to fall for that, are you?"

He didn't answer; just looked across at Sweeny with his eyebrows down. Sweeny kept it up; about every ten seconds, "Hey, Watson, you big hobo!" And when Watson came on deck for his bat, Sweeny speeded up over and over. "Hey, Watson, you big hobo!"

Watson got his hit just the same, was left stranded on base, and went straight out to his place in the field, so Sweeny kept still until the inning was over. But as soon as our gang came back to the dugout, he started up again, "Hey, Watson, you big hobo!"

I never took my eye off Watson, and when he got up and started in toward our locker, I was after him. I knew he couldn't walk right over to Sweeny because our manager wouldn't let him, and anyhow he would probably have been mobbed, but I smelled trouble just the same. And I was right.

Watson cut back under the stands, paying no attention to me, until he got to the Leopards' locker room. There he gave a colored rubber a dollar to go out and tell Sweeny somebody wanted to see him. We didn't have long to wait.

When Sweeny showed, he had all the Leopards who weren't actually on the field behind him. They knew what was up, all right, and by their looks, their money was on Sweeny. Sweeny walked over to Watson, laughing at him.

"You looking for me, Jack?"

"Yes," said Watson. "I'm looking for you."

Sweeny grinned some more. "Well, what do you figure on doing now you found me?"

"I figure on poking you in the nose."

"When's that going to be?"

"That's going to be right now."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

SO THAT was how it started, on bare ground under the grandstand, with twenty lads behind Sweeny and me behind Watson. From the start I knew Watson didn't have a chance. The whole thing was too crude. He was too well known now for anybody to pick a scrap with him unless they had good reason to think they could beat him.

And Sweeny was good. I'd seen much worse stuff in main bouts in the ring. For a minute he and Watson looked even, both swinging hard and often, then he caught Watson in the eye with a straight right and I figured it wouldn't be long. Soon he got the other eye and Watson was three quarters blind. Watson stumbled against one of the supports of the grandstand and Sweeny stood back and laughed. Watson got clear and waded in again, but Sweeny held him off and cut his face to pieces. From the blood running into Watson's eyes, I figured he couldn't see anything.

I stepped in between them. "We quit," I said. "You got too much stuff."

"To hell with that," Sweeny said. "It's him that's got to quit, not you."

I caught hold of Watson's arm. "Come on out of this. They're trying to ruin you for the series."

"Let go!" Watson mumbled. "I'll get him!"

Maybe Sweeny got tired from knocking him down so often, maybe he stopped to laugh a second too long; anyhow one of Watson's swings suddenly landed and Sweeny went down. He didn't get up so quickly either, and when he did he had stopped laughing. Watson came crowding in on him and landed a punch to the stomach. I saw the punch plainly; it was a good three inches above the belt, fair all the way, but Sweeny bent double, holding his middle and yelling. "You yellowbelly, you hit me low!"

I didn't know what to look for. It was Watson's chance to go on and knock him out. For all I know, Watson really was a mean egg. I'd lived with him for several months and I still couldn't say how much

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of his stuff was inside him and how much was just to give him a name in the papers.

But when he heard Sweeny yell, his guard came down and he reached out for the guy's shoulder.

"I didn't go to do it, buddy," he grunted. "I can't see good. I——"

Then while he was still fumbling around, Sweeny straightened up and let him have his right to the chin with everything behind it. Watson dropped like a bucket of water, flat and cold. Then Sweeny started laughing again.

The rest of the Leopards didn't do so much laughing, however, and a couple of them helped me carry Watson back to our locker room.

The doctor did his best for him, but he didn't get back in the game that day and we lost in ten innings.

THE next day Watson was on the job, his face bandaged up, but as soon as he would show anywhere, Sweeny would begin his song all over again, "Hey, Watson, you big hobo!"

When Watson was at bat it was worst of all, and he knew he couldn't do anything about it. He struck out three times and chopped one to the pitcher.

The other two games went just the same way, and that was how we lost the pennant that year. After the last game Sweeny disappeared and nobody could learn anything about him.

I have a place up in Connecticut where I raise foxes during the off season and I didn't expect to see any more of Watson until the next spring.

I had my bag packed and a taxi waiting before I suspected anything out of the way. I went over and shook hands with him.

"So long, kid," I said. "See you next March."

He looked at me out of the corners of his eyes in that way he had.

"You won't see me next March."

I grinned. "What's the matter? Going to be a hold-out until April?"

"I quit. That's what's the matter. I'm done with baseball."

I'd heard new men talk that way before. "Yeah? Well don't tell the Old Man until you think it over."

"I already told him." He lifted his head, half snarling at me. "Listen, guy, do I generally kid when I talk, or do I back up what I say?"

"All right," I said. "Quit. And then what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to go in the ring and learn that professional stuff or get what brains I got beat out trying."

"Think you'll like that better than playing ball, do you?"

"No, I won't like it. Baseball's my game. But I got to beat that bird Sweeny before I can play ball, ain't I? And I got to keep on making good money somehow."

He stopped, started to say something more and shut up again.

"Why," I said, "I shouldn't think a single lad like you would have much trouble getting by."

"Well," he said slowly. "I ain't exactly single. I mean I ain't got only myself to spend jack on. I got a young sister in college and I'm going to keep her there."

Remembering his opinion of college boys must have made me look peculiar, because he didn't stop. "It all goes, what I said about college guys, but girls ain't expected to fight their way. And she's a good kid." Then after a minute, with his face getting red, "Hell, she never sees me. She don't know I'm alive."

"Well," I said, "Do you know anything about the fight racket?"

"No," he grunted. "But I seen a couple bouts this summer and I ain't worrying much."

"All the same you don't want to go wrong on your manager. Here." I wrote a name and address on a scrap of paper and handed it to him. "Tell this bird I sent you."

I'd pitched for the Red Wings for fifteen years and coached for four more and I knew pretty nearly everybody in any kind of athletics in the city. Ever since his

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scrap with Sweeny, I had liked Watson a good bit.

But around Thanksgiving Watson had his first bout, not with a set-up but with a good average heavyweight who was willing to take a chance in order to get in on the money Watson's name would draw as a curiosity. Watson won in three rounds.

After that he came faster than any heavyweight before or since. He went tearing in like a savage; they couldn't stop him. He beat three good men in two months, and the papers, which were more delighted than ever with the copy he gave them, began talking championships.

I knew that was just talk as well as they did; the champ was as clever as Corbett. But it did mean reputation for Watson. Pretty soon though, as you might expect, the "serious contenders" began to shy off from him. It was an easier life pushing each other around.

Then all at once, a heavy who had been knocking them cold around the West Co- it, decided to come East. He was an exp i- enced fighter called Jack Norman, but 'd never been East before. The few who id seen him fight said he was a tough b y, and, backing this up, before he ever ft Los Angeles, his manager signed fc a twelve-round go with Watson.

The day of the fight, I suddenly dec d to leave the foxes to take care of tl m- selves, and caught a train to the city by pulling all the wires in sight I also got r- self a ringside seat.

I didn't see either Watson or No m before the fight but I did pick up a le more information about Norman It seemed he was a tricky fighter, did a of talking in the ring, and would rathe n in by making a fool out of the other lad an by straight fighting. Yet he could d the straight fighting, too, if he had to. H had been brought up around Hollywoo and begun fighting at the club there off a on at about eighteen. In fact he had rer done anything but fight and was ow twenty-four, a comer.

I was worried about Watson. I h no confidence in his head work. Ag a fighter known for his tricks, I coul n't see anything but trouble ahead.

Anyhow, from the size of the crowd that showed up at the arena that night, Watson's sister's college course looked safe. It was a sell-out.

I came in during the semi-windup and, while it was a good bout, I couldn't take much interest in it for thinking about Watson.

At last it was lights up and here came the principals down to the ring. I caught Watson's eye as he climbed through the ropes and he gave me a quick, one-sided grin.

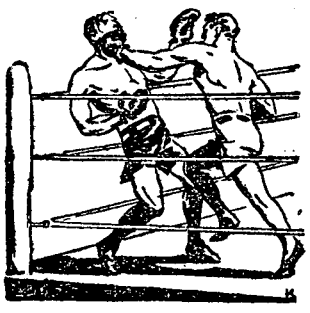
Then for the first time I took a look at Norman, and I nearly tipped over my chair. He was the Leopards' "infielder" Sweeny, hair slicked down, in perfect shape, and half laughing as usual. The Leopards had hired him to beat Watson up and then sent him back out West. He'd never played baseball in his life.

And as soon as Watson got a name he had probably figured, "Well, there's one scrapper in the East I can take anyhow," and so come over hot-foot.

WHEN I got my breath back, I looked at Watson, but he'd probably seen Norman when they weighed in and the shock was over for him. There was only a funny look around his eyes and mouth that showed he knew Norman at all.

The referee gave a little extra talk to Norman, who took it grinning, but the bell struck before I'd quite gotten clear in my mind what had happened.

The boys came out fighting. And I mean fighting. It wasn't toe to toe stuff; they stepped around all the time, but it was fast and vicious. A couple of hooks and straight punches, then close in with uppercuts and short body blows until they finally worked into a clinch, still fighting. From the start the referee had trouble breaking them. They were hitting so hard that even glancing blows would draw blood. Norman snapped Watson's head back twice near the end of the first round, but Watson got in



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a short right under the heart a second before the bell. Both boys were bleeding as they came to their corners and there wasn't much to choose between them. But I had looked for Watson to hold his own in the early rounds.

Norman began some fancy stuff in the second and I could see he was talking in the clinches. But it seemed not to bother Watson this time. He looked clumsy when Norman held both gloves high in the air, half-feinting with them and drawing Watson's eyes up and making him miss. But when Norman crouched, his gloves at his sides, laughing, to make Watson lead at his face, Watson dropped his own gloves and walked across the ring, so that Norman had to jump up and run after him. Then all of a sudden, throwing all this aside, they tore into each other again.

I could hear the smack and thump of the gloves and the scrape of their feet as if it was one sound; the lights over the ring beat down almost in my face and at my back the mob was roaring. The fighters were blotchy red and covered with sweat, their faces strained as they smashed away at each other. As close as I was, I could see their eyes; they were wild. Norman tried a little dirty work, butting and using his elbows, but Watson gave it back with interest and Norman slowed down.

Neither man dropped until the round was nearly over. Then in a clinch in the corner opposite me, their legs locked somehow, and they went down together. Norman's head smacked on the floor but Watson saved himself by putting out his right hand. Still, Watson was a little slower in getting up. The bell stopped them before they could mix it up again.

At the start of the third round, Watson changed his tactics in a way that had me puzzled for a minute. He started boxing carefully, using a long left to lead with and holding his right cocked almost under his chin. Even when Norman landed twice square in his face, he wouldn't let that right fly.

Then all at once I saw through it; he was trying to fool Norman into thinking that he had hurt his right hand when they fell and couldn't use it. That would make Norman careless and maybe make him leave himself open for a haymaker. But at the same time I felt sorry for Watson; it was pathetic, his trying to outwit a cagey fighter like Norman, and using, at that, almost the same trick Norman had worked on him. Norman saw through it as soon as I did; I could tell that. He began to keep his distance, jabbing and getting away in a hurry, his eyes fixed on that right of Watson's. They danced the rest of the round, with Norman having the best of the dancing. If anything, Watson's footwork was worse than it had been.

THE fourth and fifth rounds went the same way, Norman piling up a fair lead on points but not doing much damage. Still he never took his eyes off Watson's right glove. He kept on talking in the clinches, which were less frequent now, but Watson paid no attention.

In the sixth round Norman got in a hard left to Watson's mouth leaving his body wide open. He covered up in a panic, but Watson hadn't even made a move to hit him. I had to give him credit; he was sticking to his plan. A punch in the mouth hurts and makes you mad, but he was saving that right for a sure knockout; he wouldn't be pulled out of position. And meantime he was not afraid to take anything Norman could send.

Norman must have understood all this, because after that he looked really worried. Merely seeing through the trick didn't seem to end the danger. Norman covered up so fast after each jab and back-pedaled so much, you might have thought he was trying to last against the champion. He was so used to getting other lads' goats and riding them to death that, when his own nerve started to go, it went fast.

In the seventh Watson began doing some damage with his left. He gave up just leading, and hooked it twice with steam behind it. Those two punches were all Norman needed to start the rout. He began covering all the time and Watson banged away with his left.

The fans had been riding Norman for several rounds; now it came so hard that he got desperate and opened up in a flurry with everything. Nearly every punch he

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threw at Watson landed and in fifteen seconds Watson's face was covered with blood. Still he held his right.

Watson got what looked to me like a perfect chance for that right near the end of the round, but still nothing happened. Norman was slugging him hard at the bell.

In the early part of the eighth Norman kept it up; he was desperate, didn't care what happened, and I would have laid a good sized bet he had no idea how much he was hurting Watson. Watson was groggy, pretty nearly out on his feet. I was watching his face and thinking; I didn't have all my mind set on waiting for his right to strike me like a bolt of lightning. Norman left himself open several times and I was afraid that now Watson had gotten what he'd waited for so long, he was past seeing it.

But at last it did get through. Norman was in close, battering away with both hands, his teeth showing in a snarl, when Watson got off a sidestep that made Norman miss. This brought Watson's back squarely in front of my seat and I saw his body set itself. Then his right came up and across, the muscles of his turning shoulder and side behind it. It caught Norman on the button, with the sound of the blow and the fall lost in the fans' yell. Watson just stood there for five or six seconds the sweat pouring off him, and the tendons under his knees jerking, while all hands yelled to him to get into a neutral corner. Then he staggered along the ropes a few steps, his face as white as paper under the smears of blood and the referee began his count. The few seconds lost didn't make any difference; Norman was out for ten minutes.

AS SOON as I could get clear of the mob around me, I fought my way down to Watson's dressing room to congratulate him. But I found the door locked, two of his handlers and three cops standing guard. It took me a good while and some money, too, to get my name sent in, but as soon as Watson got it, he said to let me in.

I found him lying on the table inside, still looking pale and bad, with Waxman, his manager, and the club doctor bending over him. But I couldn't get over what he'd done.

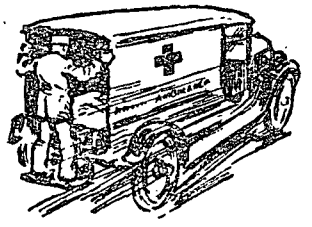
"Great stuff, kid!" I said. "Great! You didn't fool him the way you meant to, but you got him in the end."

Watson blinked at me. "What do you mean, I didn't fool him? He never noticed it for six rounds, did he?"

"Listen," I said, "never noticed what?"

"That I busted my wrist when we fell there in the third. What do you think? I changed my style of scrapping so he wouldn't think there was anything cockeyed when I didn't use my right. All I hoped to do was last the distance, but he got too careless."

"And so you put him away," I said slowly, "with a broken wrist?"



"Yes," put in the club doctor, "and compounded the fracture so he'll never be able to enter a ring again. We're waiting now for an ambulance to take him to the hospital and I don't want him to talk too much."

"But—but—he'll be able to bat and throw all right, won't he?"

"Sure," said the doctor. "In about three months." For some reason, his snappiness eased up a little. "And it needn't be let out that he can't fight. We'll blame the trip to the hospital on something else and keep everything dark. It's not likely any ball player will want to fight him after tonight."

"The only thing gets me," Watson broke in from his table, "is how the team will make out until I can get in there with my bat. Not only my hitting .400, but there ain't a pitcher in the league that don't get rattled when I'm in he game and that makes it easier for the rest. I got my job cut out for me. I sure got to pull that ball club out of a hole."

So I saw it had gotten to be a habit with him and he couldn't help it, but it didn't bother me any more; I knew the lad himself.

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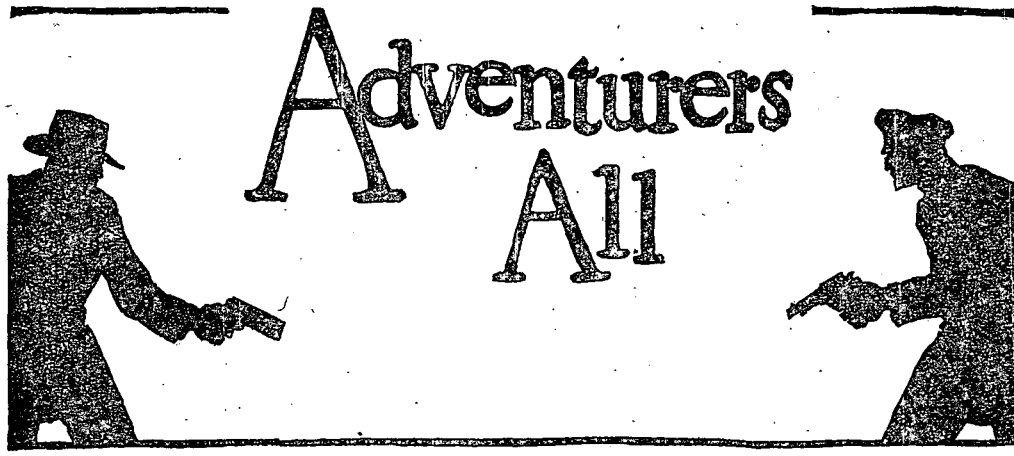

THOSE WHO CARRY GUNS

HAL BEGGS and myself had been doing night police for rival morning papers in a big Western coast town for five years when Hypo Gomez and Jim Dallas shot down a poor devil who didn't get his hands up fast enough.

In those five years Hal and I had carried pistols when we went with the shotgun squad on its rush jobs. Not even once during those five years had we drawn our guns. And when we jumped into the heavy touring car with the squad and found Sergeant Tom Mullins ordering us out because "there was going to be shooting," we laughed and showed him our revolvers and told him how brave we were.

Wise old Sergeant Mullins said, "Believe me, boys, those who tote guns when they don't need to also tote trouble."

We lighted cigarettes nonchalantly. We weren't very far out of kid days.

Beggs was a handsome, inquisitive type of reporter, well dressed, a bit of a braggadocio, sometimes quick-tempered, but always generous to the last of his pay check. His one great enthusiasm—aside from unearthing a good story for his paper—was guns. His room was littered with them. He loved them. The prize of all in his collection was a beautiful automatic, and it was this gun that he had showed to Sergeant Mullins as we sped carelessly into tragedy that night, smiling, jesting until——

Suddenly there shot before us a speeding car.

"Looks like!" snapped the sergeant. "Step on it, Gallagher!"

Gallagher was driving. Beside him was Bill Burns, inspector and department crack shot. Beggs and I were in the rear seat with the sergeant.

Then from the rear of the automobile ahead came a spurt of flame. It was Gomez and Dallas getting away in a stolen car.

The windshield of our car was shattered in Burns' very face. He cursed and brushed splintered glass from his lap.

"How about?" he yelled.

"Give it!" roared the sergeant.

Burns' gun spoke. We were now leaning out of the auto, Beggs and myself out of the right side, while the sergeant leaned half-way out of the left side of the car.

The sergeant opened fire. There was an answer from the car in front and a piece of our side curtain snapped off and flew behind into the street.

"Step on it, Gallagher!" Mullins cried.

"Seventy-five," the driver called back. "Won't make more."

The remaining glass of the windshield showered over his cap as he bent over the wheel. Burns' gun spoke five times, then he reached down to the floor, produced a shotgun and let it blaze twice.

The speeding car ahead kept its distance. We were in the factory district now, and there was no traffic to interfere with our mad chase. We went around a corner on two wheels. We skidded into a curb and crashed our rear wheels hard, but Galla-

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gher swung the heavy car away with a burst of speed. Suddenly we saw the car ahead strike a pile of sand in front of a building under construction. We closed in until only a hundred yards separated us.

"Give it to them!" called the sergeant.

With trembling hand I pointed my revolver. I remember that as I pulled the trigger I prayed I wouldn't hit anyone. There was a report that seemed to tear my hat off. I pulled the trigger again and again, frantically, eagerly, the sudden lust for slaying strangely in my heart.

Mullins fired his revolver in a continuous spurt of flame. Burns was blazing away again with the shotgun. From the car in front came two long, intermittent spurts of flame, straight at us like burning spears.

Then, just as suddenly, the car had shot ahead again and was lost around a corner. Burns held up his arm and cursed. I *sensed* more than saw blood running from his hand.

"Tough, Bill," said the sergeant, reloading.

We came to the curve and went around it. There before us, in a crazy pile against a pole, was the car we sought. Our brakes screamed as we came up. We jumped forward with leveled guns. No one was there.

As we stood bewildered, a shot rang out from a factory loft above, and a bullet smashed into our car.

We fell behind the wreck as if shot. And there, lying beside Beggs, I noticed that he was unarmed.

"I threw it away," he fairly screamed at me. "The damn' thing! After carrying it five years, hoping to get a shot in just such a case as this—well, believe it or not, it wouldn't shoot! It jammed tight! I threw it away so damn' hard it must have gone through the pavement! That *beautiful gun!*" He almost sobbed.

We looked up and saw the other men edging into the door of the building. Without a thought we both raised ourselves and dashed after them.

"Stay back!" I said to Beggs. "You haven't a gun now!"

"And yours is empty!" he informed me. "I counted your shots!"

I felt weak. It was true. Here we were in the building, helpless as lost children, and two of the city's most desperate and "coke"-filled gunmen somewhere near us in the murk of the interior. There was a single, unshaded electric bulb burning above our heads.

"Cops gone upstairs," whispered Beggs.

And as he spoke a door near us opened. Hypo Gomez appeared, holding a revolver on us, his eyes blazing with fire.

My own gun was empty; Beggs, after five years of waiting, had none!

Gomez fired point blank, then made a dash for the street.

We both fell as if we had been shot—and Beggs had. He died the next day.

—Bruce Johns

$25 For True Adventures

UNDER the heading Adventurers All, the editors of SHORT STORIES will print a new true adventure in every issue of the magazine. Some of them will be written by well known authors, and others by authors you have never heard of. Any reader of the magazine may submit one of these true adventures, and for every one accepted the author will be paid $25. It must be written in the first person, must be true, and must be exciting. Do not write more than 1000 words; be sure to type your manuscript on one side of the page only; and address it to: "Adventurers All," Care of Editors of SHORT STORIES Magazine, Garden City, N. Y. Manuscripts which are not accepted will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for that purpose.

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The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

Peavey Pushers

IF ANYONE knows "peavey pushers" better than Robert E. Pinkerton we'll swallow whole (and unwashed) our only red undershirt. He's contributed "Hell's Noon Whistle Blows," which is an exciting story of logging life, to this issue of SHORT STORIES. And if you find it as realistic and as exciting as we do, you'll be hungry for a little information on these men of the logging country from the author of the story. Listen to Pinkerton himself eulogize on the old-time logger:

"I first saw the logging country of northern Wisconsin in 1883, but at an age when only rattles and food were of interest. It was in the very heart of the white pine country, and I spent seven years there. My playmates were the sons of loggers. The streets were paved with sawdust and the sidewalks were ripped by calked shoes.

"I worked in logging camps and on log drives, was in close touch with the north woods for more than ten years, and came to know intimately the type of man who made possible the lumber harvest of Wisconsin in the days of my infancy.

"The old-time lumberjack ranks with the cow puncher in picturesqueness. He was a hard drinker, a hard fighter and a hard worker, and proud of his success in each line of effort. He was an individualist, of keen wit and original speech. Of all his characteristics, the one I most admired was his pride in himself as an artisan. That pride forbade soldiering on the job, and it forbade loyalty except to a better man.

"You can see 'em today out here on the British Columbian coast. They haven't changed in any way, except that absence of the old time logging camp foreman forces them to be their own bosses. They are hand loggers now, putting into the sea the giant firs and cedars without machine aid. It is one man against a fifteen-ton tree, a white-haired old man who makes 'his head save his back,' but because he came from Wisconsin or Michigan, and knew the Saginaw and the Chippewa and the St. Croix, the tree loses. Always!"

"Smile When You Say That!"

Dear Editor,

I was interested in the discussion in your columns about "Mountie" as a shortening of Royal Northwest Mounted Police as. I have always had a lot of impatience with people who objected to the shortening of San Francisco to Frisco. Mountie and Frisco are good, short, ringing words, and the local objections to their use indicate a misplaced pride. Both words are pungent and adventurous, as is also the familiar shortening of San Bernardino to San Berdoo. In San Bernardino, it isn't even a case of "Smile when you use that word, stranger!" You are mobbed. Why are Westerners so sensitive? Natives of Chicago don't object to Chi, and Jacksonvillians remain calm and orderly if you call their city Jax. Is there something lacking in the Western sense of humor? Mariners rightly object to landlubbers calling a ship a boat; the wrath of mountaineers when plainsmen call their lofty peaks hills is

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understandable. But it is a real mystery why Westerners go berserk when you use such diminutives as Mountie, Frisco and San Berdoo. It is quite all right to call San Francisco San Fran. Perhaps some of your Western readers can shed light on this mystery.

George Worts

Head Hunters

THE Formosans, in "Gold and Skulls," Sidney Herschell Small's novelette in this issue of SHORT STORIES, aren't made any more blood-thirsty than they actually are. So far as we know, Formosa is the only place in the world—for a long time, certainly—where human flesh is sold in the open markets. Here's a report from an eye-witness: "savage flesh was brought in, in baskets, the same as pork, and sold like pork in the open markets before the eyes of all, foreigners included."

That hasn't anything to do with the story, but it does break down the rather common notion that head-hunters are never cannibals. The Formosans hunt heads for the same general reason that other wild peoples do and did—to show courage, to become a chief if enough are captured, to be able to marry, to qualify for the tribal council. Because of continued head hunting, the women outnumber the men by about three to one. The heads are boiled, the flesh separated, and the skull placed in a sort of open-air museum—the more skulls, the greater the local Rotary Club can boast about the town, I suppose—or they are set up over the doorway of the man who did the killing. Tribes who are unable to get sufficient human heads will take those of monkeys.

The Japanese are civilizing the aborigines, much as we did in the Islands, but without Krags; machine guns do it more rapidly. The story of "Gold and Skulls" has a solid background of truth; the attack on the Japanese was reported in the Tokyo press.

Strong Man

THE Better Man," Ralph R. Perry's short story in this issue of the magazine, grew out of several unrelated facts. "There was a Russian," says the author, "who was the strongest man physically I ever knew. Once when I saw him I was sitting in an ordinary bentwood chair and he grasped the top in one hand and lifted me clear of the floor, holding the chair vertical. That took almost abnormal strength of forearm and wrist.——Then, I've always been interested in what happens to men who are alone for long periods of time in wild country. They seem to get hallucinations, and I'd like to have a good explanation of the reason. Finally, I believe there's no real test of a man's strength, either physical or moral, until he has to fight something that he knows is really too strong for him. That is, what makes a man *better* is outgaming something that has him licked—in the same way, perhaps, that one can't say he's brave until he has been afraid.——That's what went into the pot. I cooked it for about ten days, wrote about twice as much as I kept, and finished with what you saw."

"Shoot to Kill!"

KNOW what a "Swedish Rap" is? Well, read Kerry Ralston's story by that title in this issue. Meanwhile, here's what Ralston has to tell us about how the story grew:

"As a cub reporter some years back, I personally knew a number of the gangsters and red-hots who, under various aliases, have since romped across the pages of SHORT STORIES in crime tales. The relations of the local staff with these men were quite friendly; one gang extended us a standing invitation to use at any time its private pistol range out on the river, some miles from city limits.

"One morning six of us drove out there, well heeled. Most of us were carrying rods, and there were occasions when they proved comforting during the night trick. We set up targets, and the first man blazed away.

"Across that river and down a bit lay a sand-dredge, hidden by trees, but we didn't know that. The trouble with these forty-five framed thirty-eight S. & W.'s is that they'll kill a man in the next county.

"There was a sudden fury of shouts. At

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first thought we were prepared to take our medicine for accidental shooting. But then we heard several boats coming over, and more talk.

"'Down that way, Sheriff!'

"'Cut them off from the railroad. Swing south there!'

"'Shoot to kill!——' and the voice broke into a flood of oaths.

"After that we made too much noise to stop to listen.

"Loafing up that way on a fishing trip several months later, I got the straight of the thing from the dredge crew foreman. It seemed that ours were not the first bullets that had come perilously close to the men on the dredge. This foreman was quite a reader of the papers and was interested in crime news. With a big telescope he had previously been able to identify a couple of the gangster friends who had loaned us the use of the pistol range. They had then tipped off the local law. The sheriff and two deputies had made the dredge their headquarters, and they had been lying in wait for the gangsters on that particular morning.

"'Yeah, they got away.' the foreman admitted. 'Them weren't men; they were eagles. One tow-headed fellah—I'd say he was *exactly your build and color*—you'd ought to have seen *him!* Neck stretched way out ahead like a turtle, and legs working so fast that all you could see was a blur.'"

Pitcher-Puncher

MILLARD WARD tells us that his story "The Great *I* Am" (in this issue of SHORT STORIES) was suggested to him, as you may have guessed if you have read it, by the career of Charles Arthur Shires of the White Sox. Ward says he knows nothing about Shires except what he's read in the papers, and that the story is fiction in every detail. The idea of a combination ball player and fighter interested him very much. To keep his man from being forbidden to fight by Judge Landis, as Shires was, Ward has him temporarily sever his connection with baseball. That gets around that difficulty and the rest is plain sailing.

Planet Chaser

GET out your old globe—you're going to travel next time. SHORT STORIES, in the space of only one hundred and seventy-six pages, is whirling you from East to West, from top to bottom of this old planet in quest of excitement and adventure to keep you alive and interested. Not to say thrilled and palpitating. Here's how it's done.

From the Orient of H. Bedford-Jones' "The Tiger of Siam" (a novelette that tells of a hard fight to break one of the biggest crooks of the East), you slip down into the South Seas for a pearling adventure with Ralph R. Perry. "Pearl Madness," he

READERS' CHOICE COUPON

"Readers' Choice" Editor, SHORT STORIES:
Garden City, N. Y.

My choice of the stories in this number is as follows:

1_____ 3_____

2_____ 4_____

5_____

I do not like:

_____ Why?_____

NAME_____ ADDRESS_____

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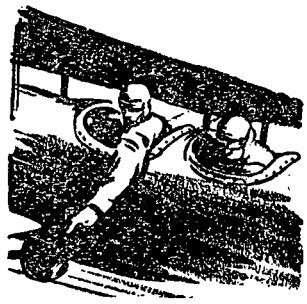
calls it, and we've no hesitation in saying that it packs a wallop. Next, heave your anchor and drift across the North Pacific to the Gulf of Alaska. Inland a short distance is the Klondike, and that's where "Dynamite," by James B. Hendryx is laid. It's a story that will get you with its tale of dynamite and the perfect crime. Then take a coastwise steamer and run down to Frisco, the port nearest the Old West. William Corcoran supplies a complete novel called "Visitors to Perdition"—a yarn of punchers and six-guns—and Gordon Young concludes his "Red Clark of Tulluco." Even though it's the last installment of this Red Clark story, you can still begin it (turn to the installment in this issue and read the synopsis). From the Old West take a trans-continental plane east, and land near any big city. For city prizefighters are the characters in Eddy Orcutt's "Five Rounds Or——" Finally, ship for Africa, which was the country L. Patrick Greene referred to when he titled his novelette "Death's Larder." A yarn for excitement, a tale for thrills!

But there isn't room here to tell you any more. Buy the magazine itself and see how well it fulfills its promise.

OUTLANDS AND AIRWAYS

Strange facts about far places and perilous air trails. Send in yours.



Tricking the Wild Beasts

AN AMUSING method has been devised in the Malay jungles for the capture, alive, of dangerous wild animals of the cat family; namely, tigers and leopards. They are captured alive and uninjured through the use of birdlime which is a mucilage made from the gum of a tree.

In catching tigers or leopards, the hunter spreads out the birdlime where they will pass and then carefully covers it with leaves. When a cat animal puts his foot in the stuff, he becomes so enraged and helpless that he is easily captured. The tiger or leopard that steps in birdlime doesn't step gracefully out of it and run away; he tries to bite the stuff from his paws and then he gets it on his face. When he tries to rub it off his face with his paws, he plasters it over his eyes. Finally, when he is thoroughly covered with it, he is so helpless that he can be put into a cage with little danger and there he spends weeks working patiently to get the sticky gum out of his fur.

Birds and monkeys are also captured in birdlime smeared on the limbs of trees; they stay in it until someone goes up and pulls them out.

Another amusing way of capturing small monkeys is by means of a sweetened rag in a bottle. The bottle is covered with green rattan and tied to a tree. The monkey puts his hand through the neck and grabs the rag. He cannot pull his hand out while it is doubled up with the rag in it and he hasn't sense enough to let go. There the monkey stays, fighting with the bottle until the hunter comes along and, by pressing the nerves in the little animal's elbow, forces him to open his hand and leave the rag for the next monkey.

Whale and Perfume

HAVE you ever wondered what makes the fragrant odor of perfumes last? It is ambergris.

Ambergris is a secretion produced only in the intestines of the sick sperm whale. It is never found in a healthy whale. But,

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nevertheless, ambergris forms the base of the most delicate perfumes in the world.

When a sperm whale feeds, he sucks in untold quantities of squid, whose beaks cause irritations in the whale's intestines. Ambergris forms about the irritated spots. Sometimes it passes off with the excrementa; at other times it forms so rapidly that it clogs the intestines and the whale dies. As ambergris used to be worth about twenty dollars an ounce, such a whale is a gold mine to any man who finds him, and has the strength of stomach to burrow into the mass of decomposed intestines. The odor is terrible. But at the high prices, it is worth while to do so, as up to one hundred pounds of ambergris might be found, providing the whale was sick enough.

A Strange People

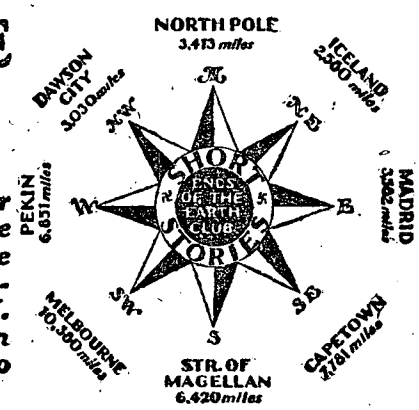
WE HAVE often heard, writes Marshall Breeden, of the Wild Man of Borneo, and then there is our old friend Bosco the Snake Eater, but even these fancies of the showman's mind are common in the world when compared to the Balucas of the Philippine Islands, who by the way actually do eat snakes, worms, grubs and such.

In the Pampanga province about one hundred fifty miles from Manila, on the island of Luzon, is a small Negrito tribe who seem to take the cake as nature's oddities. They seem of African origin; indeed look like miniature editions of primitive negroes. They may have drifted in from other parts of the archipelago, or they may have originated in some other part of Luzon. Science does not know much about them, except that they are there, and that the United States Government leaves them rather much to their own devices, excepting of course that the Army rather takes care of them.

These Balucas are hunters and fishers. They are under five feet, and weigh on an average about ninety pounds. Their skin is dark brown, hair bushy, closely kinky, and it is very scanty on face and body. The men seldom have beards, although there is a showing of hair at maturity. Their heads have a peculiar shape; about the size of a cantaloupe, short, low and broad. They have flat negro noses, thickish lips, thin calfless legs, and clumsy, trail worn feet.

The Balucas do the best they can to feed themselves, by fishing, hunting, digging for roots, worms, grubs, and snakes, but often they are up against it for food. When they have food they eat it raw. They do not have much in the way of shelters, for they roam in the woods and sleep at night around some sort of smoke fire. They make a crude sort of reed basket, and their arrow points are flattened nails secured from the army packing boxes.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB



HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, % Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

Dear Secretary:

I was born in Naples in 1895, where my father was general manager of the Italian offices of a large wholesale soap and perfume company—had worked his way up by sweat of his brow after being honorably discharged from the Foreign Legion. I lived in Naples till I was five and then,

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with my German mother, I went to visit her people in Germany. There I went to school for six years, and then the company for which my father worked, failed, and he decided to emigrate to America.

Arriving in America, he went to an agency and obtained employment in Florida. I went to high school there and later entered a Mid-Western university. During my first year there, the war cloud in Europe burst. My dad, who with great fortitude had seen it coming, had bought out a defunct shipping line and made his fortune carrying the commerce of the world in dangerous waters.

It was 1915, I first began my adventuring, I obtained employment in one of my dad's boats, under an assumed name, as a deck hand. For six months I sailed as a common hand without my father's knowledge, and then he found out. On shore again I obtained a position as a cub reporter on a big New York daily but quit it, after six weeks. Up till the time the U. S. entered the scrap, I was roughing it on the Great Lakes, in the sailing months I was in a small cutter and in the winter I bummed around New Ontario.

America finally entered the fray and I enlisted in the U. S. Cavalry but at the front I was made a dispatch rider. At the close of the War I was made a sergeant and sent to the Mexican border. I learned how to use a six-gun to my better advantage. I was discharged in 1919 and went to Brazil where I got a bullet in my shoulder.

Next I tried my hand at fruit exporting but got fed up on that. In 1922, I decided to finish my university course and went to Germany to do it. In the University of Berlin, I obtained my B. A. Returning to America I wrote several articles for magazines and soon was signing my name with flourishes.

In the following year, 1925, I was in Paris and got the offer to accompany an expedition to Central Africa to study the native in his home. I went and was lost for a year, being discovered nearly dead with fever. Returning to civilization I was informed of my mother's death. Heartbroken, I proposed to settle down and engaged chambers in London. There I came in contact with a nice set and joined a smart club.

In 1929 my friend, Mr. Leon de Moubray, and I opened a cabaret on the French-American plan. It is still thriving but I left it to come to Canada last May. I'm living in diggings at the below address, till the end of this week and then I'm leaving for a canoeing trip up North. But, if my card is forwarded by the next two weeks my cousin will bring it to me as he is going to join me for his summer vacation.

Sincerely yours,
Cyril Henderson

c|o Parr,
532 Perth Ave.,
Toronto, Canada..

Dear Secretary:

The E. E. C. is very interesting indeed. I turn to the E. E. C. the first thing after I get my copy of SHORT STORIES, because I love to read the letters of extended travel. I have traveled a little myself, in my thirty years of life. Yes, I was thirty years old last March, and my travels extend to nineteen States of the U. S. A.; also Canada, Mexico, Hawaiian Islands, Japan, Siberia, China and the Philippine Islands.

I am American born, but of English descent. I will be glad to exchange letters with both male and female, old and young, from all parts of the world. So, come on folks and let's swap a few yarns.

With best regards to the magazine and the E. E. C., I am

Sincerely yours,
G. Edward Trent

P. O. Box 1169,
Johnson City, Tenn.

Dear Secretary:

Having had the pleasure of reading your fine magazine and living in Canada some few months, and being especialy interested in the Ends of the Earth Club, I am hoping to be enrolled as a member.

I have traveled extensively since first leaving England in 1924, having spent five years in Australia, and visited Egypt, the Suez Canal, Ceylon, South Africa, the Canary Islands, New Zealand, Hawaii, Fiji Islands and Canada. I intend going back to the old country in about three months time,

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thus completing a trip around the world. My adventures have been many and varied, and I am going to have a try at the twenty-five dollar prize for true adventures offered by your magazine!

Wishing SHORT STORIES every success for the future, and trusting to hear from you soon, I remain,

Yours sincerely,
Arthur T. Sellors

c/o 174 Canterbury Place,
East Kildonan, Winnipeg,
Manitoba, Canada

Dear Secretary:

Please enroll me as a member of your club.

As for qualifications I can only append what has transpired during the past ten years. As a ship's officer I have been around the world several times, with sojourns in Persia, India, China and Egypt. Many adventures have befallen me in my quest for experience. And a thousand memories make these languid tropical nights alive with interest. There is a saying that, once in the tropics, always a prey to its enchantment. I could not resist the offer to spend a twelve-month sojourn in Nicaragua. "Moonlight and roses" is symbolical of the tropics. To me it is "moonbeams and music." Though life is crude and conditions deplorable, there are innumerable compensations. Here one is "lord of all he surveys" and the master of his own destiny. Hunting, fishing, sailing in quaint, age-old creeks that have been unchanged since the Aztecs and Mayas were a power in the land, and, above all else, the wonderful tropic nights. These are indescribable, their incomparable beauty defying adequate comparison.

If any of your members would care for a resumé of conditions now prevalent in this country, or, for that matter, on any subject pertaining to the Far East, I shall be happy to oblige. Life down here gives one all the time necessary wherewith to write letters. As a matter of fact, I would be happy to make interesting pen pals, of either sex, per your club. It would be a means of whiling away some of the monotony.

Trusting that my qualifications meet with your standards, I remain

Very truly yours,
Walter King

Radio Station,
Bluefields, Nicaragua, C. A.

Dear Secretary:

I am a SHORT STORIES fan, and sincere.

The stories in your publications bring some parts of my past life back for review.

I came to California recently from Texas, where I was a cowpoke on my father's ranch. Later I enlisted in the Texas Border Patrol.

"Shoot It Out!," in your September 10th issue, takes my vote. I can sympathize with Sheriff Dynamite Dan. We used to have to take care of some cases like that in the Border Patrol.

Mr. Worts knows his characters—and how! But it seems to me his villain, Dakin, had some peculiar traits which are not found in the regular line of Border or mining town badmen.

I have not had much adventure—at least only on the law enforcement side of things.

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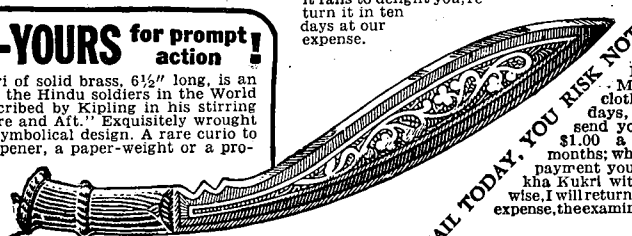

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